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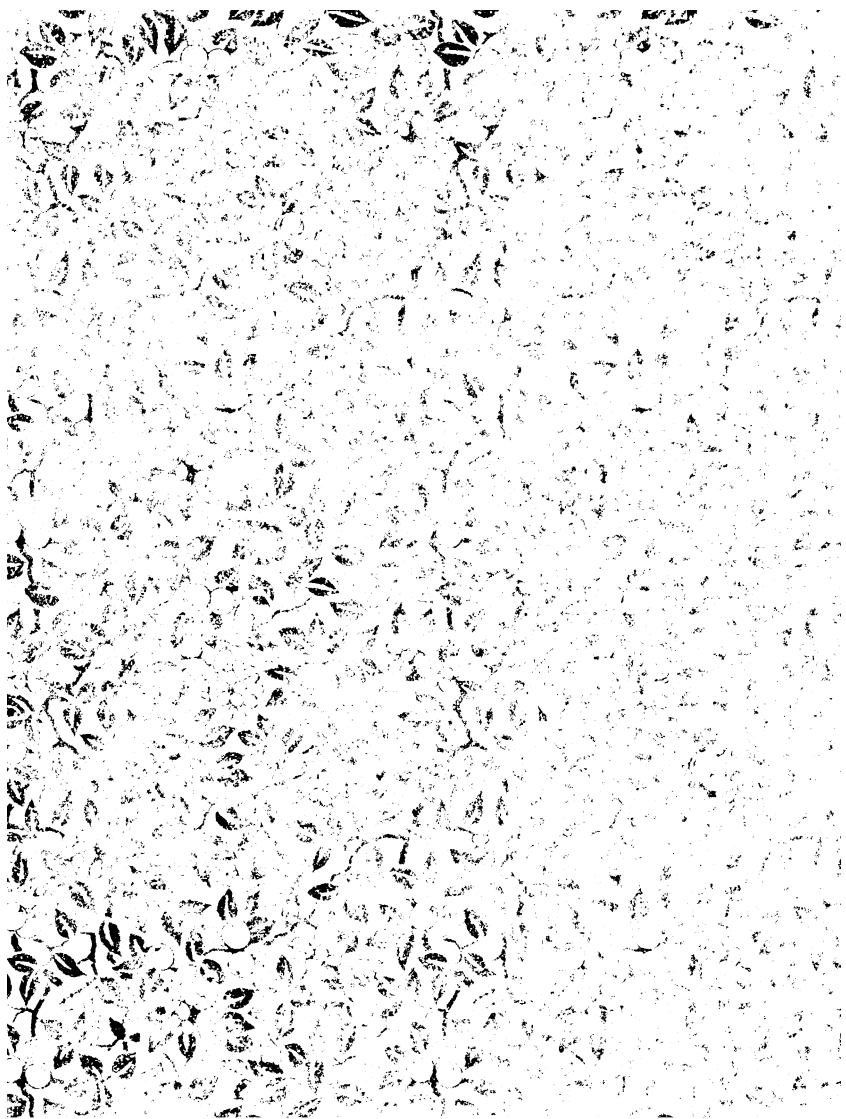
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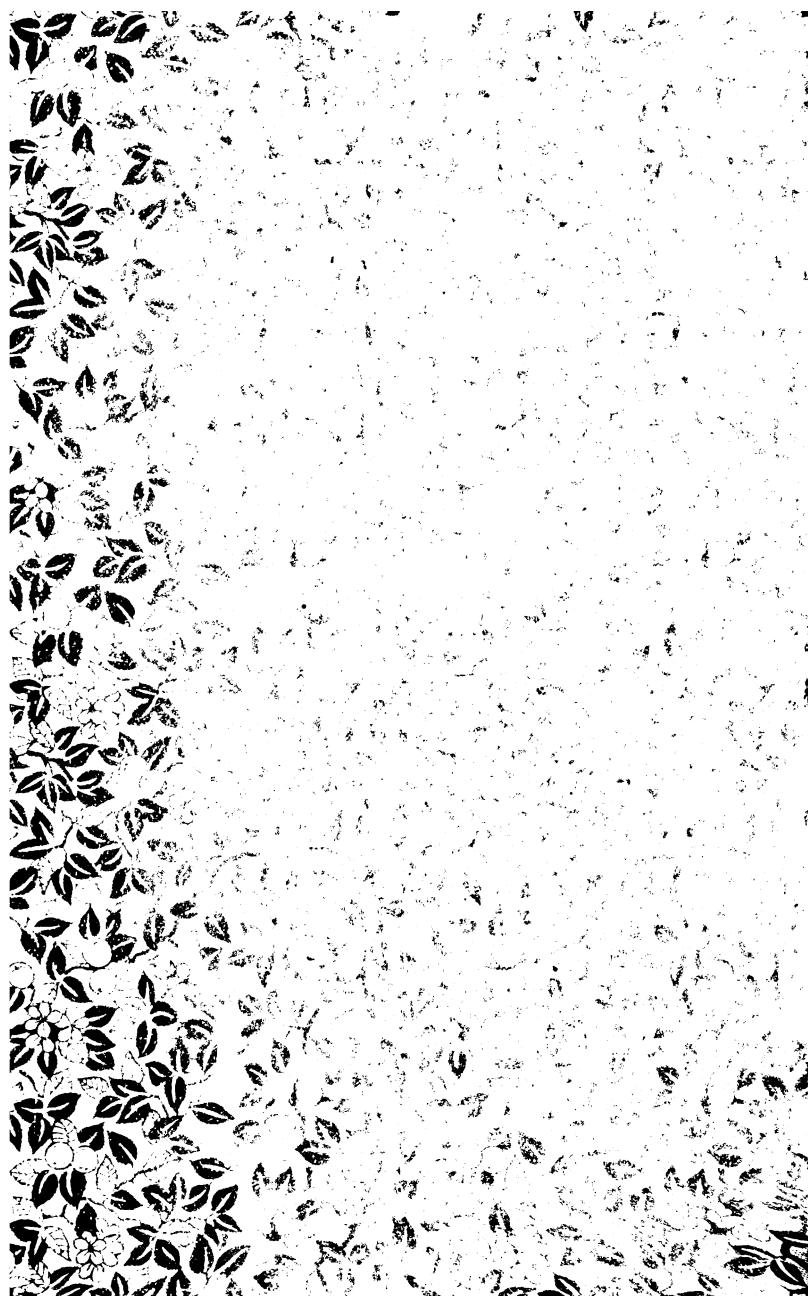
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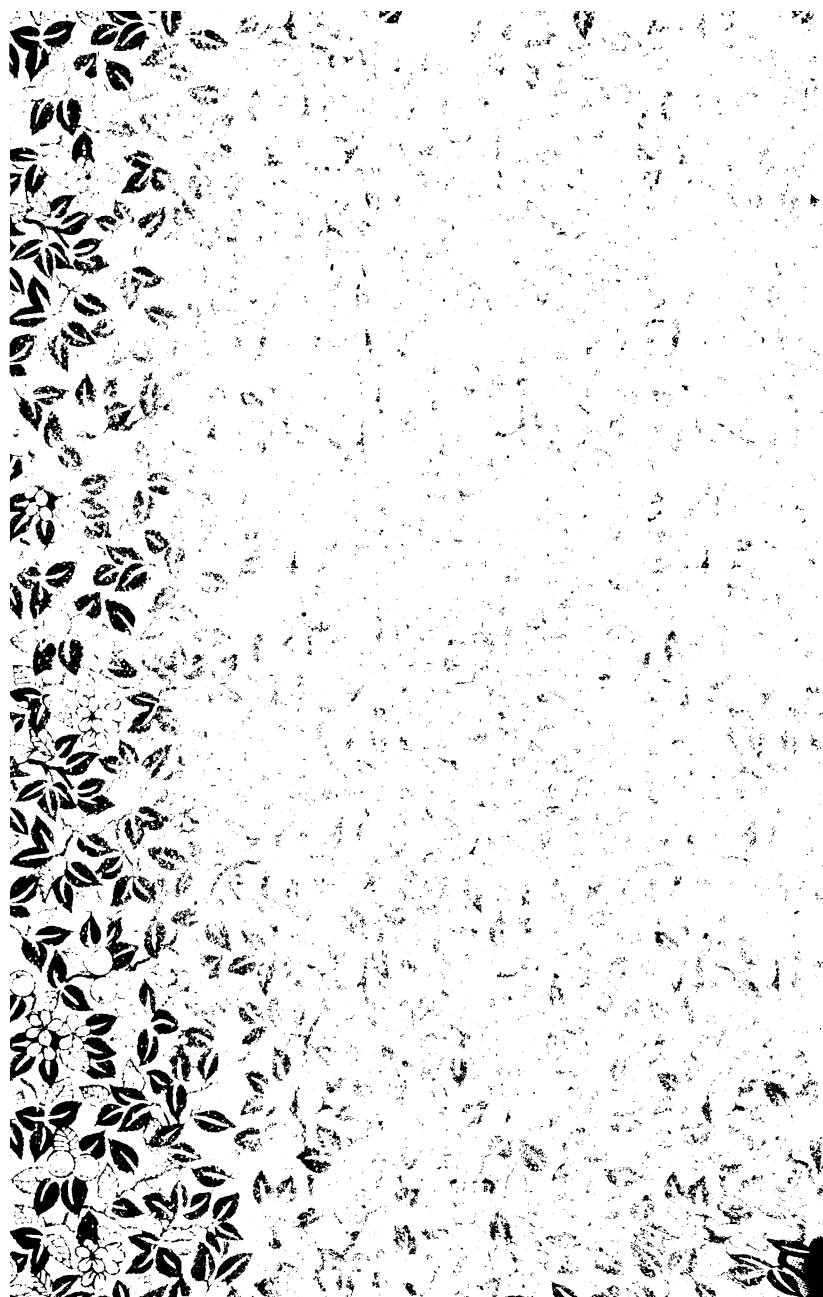
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# P E R I L .

A Novel.

BY

JESSIE FOTHERGILL,

AUTHOR OF 'THE FIRST VIOLIN,' 'HEALEY,' 'PROBATION,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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# P E R I L .



## *PART I.*

AT 61, GREAT NORTH STREET.



VOL. I.

I





## CHAPTER I.

PAUL LAWFORD TO MRS. WOODFALL.

‘Darkingford, February 18, 18—.

‘**M**Y DEAREST KATTY,

‘On the principle of business first and pleasure afterwards, listen to this: Business done by your good-for-nothing brother—none; situations secured by the same, lucrative or otherwise—none; prospects of coming into any such situation—none. Expenses since he last wrote to you, the same as the week before. If that is not taking a negative view of things, I don’t know what is. It seems to me that it would be folly to enlarge

upon a situation which is so very much like what it has been ever since I came to this—I was going to say, cursed town, only there is a folly and a futility about such expressions which revolts me ; and at my age a man should have learnt, if not to make money with success, at least to do without it with the nearest approach to equanimity that he can compass. And if there was no one but myself to think of, I don't know that there would be a more contented fellow in England. However, I will not enlarge upon that. I'm here, and on the chance of a chance turning up, here I mean to stop for the present.

‘ Now that the business is done with, let us to the pleasure, and you will open your eyes at the idea of any pleasure existing for me in a place of which I have such an opinion as I have of this. Have I ever mentioned Hugh Nowell to you, as an acquaintance of mine ? I don't feel sure,

but I think I must have done, for he is about the only fellow in all this exhilarating town in whom I have been able to get up the semblance of a feeling of interest. I saw him first at his grandfather's office ; I had an introduction to one Hankinson, the manager ; and I repaired there in search of a clerkship or correspondentship, or anything they would or could give me. I got nothing of the sort, but I made the acquaintance of this young fellow. He's a dark, handsome sort of a lad, quick-tempered, and desperately in earnest about everything—rather a contrast in that way to your humble scribe. I see you wag your head in mournful assent ; and you may continue to do so, but hear my tale, I beg. I saw Hugh Nowell, because Hankinson was out, and he was next in authority ; despite the differences between us we got talking, and hit it off in some way. He didn't find me a shop, but he came and called upon me,

|



and talked politics, as everyone does here; they are a most combative set. Politics, he informed me, were the joy of his life, and it was quite evident from his way of talking that he really believes it matters something whether you have opinions or not on the question. I pointed out to him what a mistake this is, how very much better off one is if one treats such things with the contempt that is their due. It shocked him very much; we were nearly cutting every tie of friendship, etc. : but then he kindly thought better of it, clothed his mind in a more charitable garment, excused me to himself by the theory that I was not quite all there, and we have been as thick as ever again, since. He has salved over to his own conscience the sin of associating with one who, not being an avowed Radical, must have leanings towards the opposite camp, by making the most persevering and praiseworthy attempts to con-

vert me. He brings me books on his side of the question, and pamphlets, and has good hopes that ultimately I shall lay hold of the saving faith of Radicalism and be healed. It is very nice to see so much enthusiasm ; only all his books and all his theories remind me powerfully of the tale I have lately heard about Hugh's own grandfather—a venerable man who has risen from nothing, to be fearfully and stupendously rich. Some one reproached him with having been a Radical when he was young and poor, and having turned Conservative as soon as he was old and rich.

““ Eh ! why, it's all the same,” he said. “ Radical, what is Radical ? it's nought but a Tory 'bout brass.”

‘What is more to the point, is that he—Hugh Nowell, I mean—said he would keep a look-out for anything that he thought might suit me. How old is he ? you wonder.

I have never asked him, but I should say, about five-and-twenty. And I am thirty-one, and allowing myself to be patronized by a child like this, is what you indignantly think. Wait a little, till you hear the rest of my tale. This Hugh Nowell, to be brief, is in business with his grandfather, a certain old James Nowell, who is a rough diamond if ever there was one, and who owns cotton factories—big ones—on the outskirts of the town: you would be none the wiser if I told you in which quarter, but not in this one where I live.

‘When I say Hugh is “in business” with his venerable relative, I mean, so to speak. The old fellow takes care that he shall not want for hard work, though I don’t imagine he has promoted him to any real responsibility, or given him any share in the annual profits yet. That is of little consequence, however. Old James will presently

die—ghastly though the idea may be to him, as it is to most old people—and when he does, Master Hugh will be a very rich man. Old James, I may add, is, in addition to his other engaging qualities, a thorough miser. I never saw him till last night, but I had gathered long since, from Hugh's sudden silences and reserves, whenever the discourse wandered anywhere near domestic matters, that his grandfather was not what you would call a nice old gentleman. And this is how I came to see him.

‘I had been tramping about all day, or riding on the tops of omnibuses, from one office to another, from this warehouse to that, till my whole head was weary, and my whole heart sick. I wasn't wanted in any of them. A dense fog had come on, too, thick enough to choke a dog. It was well that the darkness descended early, for not the most beautiful woman's face in the world

but would have looked green, and blue, and yellow in that atmosphere; while as for us men, the less said of us the better. I got home—*home*, you know—about half-past five, and not having tasted bite or sup since my sumptuous breakfast at eight o'clock in the morning, I commanded my landlady to let me have dinner, and although it consisted of cold shoulder-blade of mutton (I am letting myself down gently into a vegetarian), with bread and potatoes on which to carouse at discretion—or indiscretion—and although I was faint with hunger, yet, you will be astonished to hear, I did not make much of a meal. I got the ghastly-looking *débris* cleared away as soon as I could; drew the curtains—I have mentioned before that they are of green moreen with slits in them; built up a fire without regard to cost—I wonder why lodging-house coals always crumble away into white ashes as soon as

they smell the fire ; lighted my pipe, and prepared to get through the evening as well as I could. I had got a book—a novel—and I was curious to see whether any of the characters in it were so uncomfortable in their love-quarrels and high-flown troubles as I was in my suburban lodgings and with my mutton-bone. I hadn't read two pages before it occurred to me that I would first try to carve a little box for Humphrey, out of a piece of myrtle-wood that I possessed. I was just falling to upon the work, and thinking that after all the evening might not seem more than a week long, when I heard a loud ring which I was much too modest to connect in any way with myself, till Mrs. Smirthwaite opened the door and ushered in "a gentleman." You know what wild ideas one has when one is so badly off that any change at all must necessarily be for the better. Before the "gentleman" fairly got

into the room, I had time to imagine a whole series of brilliant events, culminating in my being made a partner in one of the richest manufacturing houses in Darkingford. I did not quite lose all hope when I saw who it really was—Hugh Nowell, and he looked as if he were in a hurry.

“Oh! Lawford——”

“Nowell — good-evening,” I said, dissembling, and looking as if I supposed he had just dropped in to call upon me. “How are you to-night?”

“Very well, thanks. I must not sit down. I’ve come to ask you a favour.”

“Anything that I can possibly do,” I began blandly, concluding at once that their foreign clerk had been seized with sudden illness or had an accident, and that Nowell had bethought himself of asking me to see them through the emergency.

“Well! it’s just this. I know it’s a

queer thing to ask, and no great compliment to you, but on an emergency, you know—" (I now was sure it was something of the nature I have described), "and you must not blame me for my grandfather's caprices."

"What the dickens does he mean?" thought I. "Does old Nowell want me to begin as a doffer, before rising to greater responsibility?" (A doffer, Katty, my dear, is usually a boy, occupying the meanest and most elementary grade amongst the operatives of a factory, essential, like most drudges, and despised, like all of them.) I smiled sweetly, and waited to hear more. I was almost ready to take the doffer's place, if it were offered to me.

"The fact is," Nowell said, ruffling up his brow, and half-laughing, "we're having a party to-night—at least, my grandfather is, a kind of dinner-party, half religious and half business, worldly and other worldly, at



the same time ; and one man has failed us at the last moment, and——”

‘ Then I knew, and, Katty, if it had not been that every consideration of decency and manliness, etc., forbade, I could have sat down and groaned with disappointment. I suppose my countenance expressed some of the deep disturbance which was in my soul.

‘ Nowell saw it, and luckily imputed it to my offended dignity as a man of society, and a diner-out, bless his innocent soul !

“ You must not be offended, Lawford, really. I have wished many a time to ask you to come and spend an evening with us, but I can’t ask people. It is not my fault, I assure you, that your first invitation from me comes in such a shape. I can tell you, these big business feeds, given to keep customers in good humour, are anything but enlivening ; and all I can say is, that if

you will be so good as to come, and fill up this gap, 'tis you who will confer the favour. Would you mind?"

'There is something about the lad that I can't help liking, and his earnestness amuses me. He was nearly as serious about this, as he is about the innate right of a nation to manhood suffrage. And I knew it was perfectly true that he would have asked me long ago if he could. *And*—let me be honest—the word 'dinner' had awakened hopes and desires long dormant, and, as I had hoped, dead.

'I waved aside all apologies, so as to put him at his ease, and said :

"My dear Nowell, make no excuses. We know each other sufficiently well now, I hope, to be able to ask little favours like this of each other. I will go with pleasure, if you will tell me when."

"Well, now, if you don't mind—if I

may wait while you dress, I'll take you back with me. It is but a stone's-throw."

'This is true. Old Nowell, who scorns the idea of living in anyway up to the income which he has grubbed together so toilsomely, lives not far away from me; only his house is a big one, standing in a broad thoroughfare; my lodging is in a slum, leading out of said thoroughfare.

'I left Nowell to study the splendours of my sitting-room, rushed upstairs, and reviewed my resources. They are somewhat scanty now; still, if you've got any evening toggery at all, you look much the same as another man who could buy up all Poole's shop. In about ten minutes I thought I presented a very respectable appearance.'

'Of course you did, you dear old Paul!' reflects Mrs. Woodfall, absorbed in the account, 'with your handsome face, and your yellow hair, and your bonny blue eyes,

and your figure like a prince, and feeling so hungry after your mutton-bone ! oh dear, it's a prince he ought to be, and he'll never be anything but a pauper !

' Then Nowell and I turned out into the fog, and trotted as fast as we could along the street, and round the corner to 61, Great North Street, which is where his grandfather lives. He kept up a running explanation all the way, amidst our chokings and coughings, of how it was awfully good of me to go, and how I should find the people awfully slow, and how I was not to be surprised at anything his grandfather said, or did. So I encased myself in a triple armour of resolution, that nothing short of a civil reception should awaken the slightest surprise in me ; and I kept on saying " Yes," and " No," till we got to the door, and he let himself in.

' Of course, 61, Great North Street is a

mansion fit for kings, in comparison with my dwelling ; still, as the house of a man who is said to have twenty thousand a year, it has nothing remarkable about it, except its inadequacy. It is a double house, forming the centre of a row of single ones. They have all, if you could see them by day-light, stucco fronts (stucco does not wear well in this climate), and ironwork porches, and balconies on the first-floor.

‘There was a savoury smell, I will say that ; and when we had taken off our coats, Nowell took me upstairs, and into a big room, which I suppose is the drawing-room.

‘There was a company assembled. Now that I come to the point, I feel how impossible it is for my feeble pen to do justice to that company. It is appalling when one thinks of what a vast mass of British men and women it is more or less typical. I never was so thankful before that you

and I, and all belonging to us, escaped being respectable. To that I attribute the fact that I am even so decent, or so little indecent as I am, in my life and conduct. To feel that one had to sustain the burden of a respectability like that would either crush one, paralyzed for ever, into its shape, or drive one into every kind of excess, by way of a relief from its iron gloom and monotony.

‘I think I will go on the principle of *seniores priores*, and begin with the venerable host himself. I had never seen him before. His health has been bad all winter—bronchitis, I think—and he had not been allowed to leave the house.

‘When I went in with Hugh, this venerable man was sitting at one side of the fireplace, in ordinary morning dress, and with a little black velvet skull-cap on his head; a stalwart stick, the knob of which he grasped tightly, was in his shrivelled hand. And I

got the impression that whatever he clutched or took a fancy to, be the same a thing, a whim, a prejudice, or a hatred, that same he would hold as he did the knob of his stick, with a grip that nothing but death would be able to loosen. He has silvery-white hair, innocent and hoary, falling over his bowed old shoulders. So far as one can judge from a wrinkled old face of seventy or eighty, I should say that in youth he had been handsome. But now, with every wish to make allowances for age and circumstances, all I can say is, he looked like an embodied Snarl, which might bark forth at any moment. When we came in he fixed his eyes upon us, and scowled till we could hardly see them; and he continued thus to glare at us as we went up the room—it was a good long room, and the ordeal was a trying one, but I went through it with my accustomed self-possession.

“This is Mr. Lawford, sir ; a friend of mine, who has consented to take Mr. Magson’s place.”

‘He spoke pretty loud, but his grandsire feigned not to hear him.

“*Who*, do you say ?” he asked, surveying me as if I were a pickpocket, and he would like to lay his stick about me.

‘Nowell repeated the information, while the company maintained a deadly silence.

“Hoh !” said Mr. Nowell, senior, and glared harder than ever.

‘My private opinion is that old men—or old women either, if there are any—who behave in that way ought to be strangled. Not a word of welcome, not even a “How-do-you-do ?” to which one might have muttered an answer. What can you say to “Hoh” ? I did my possible. As he said nothing, neither did I. I contained my indignation, and dissembled again, bowing solemnly, and looking



as majestic as I could. Then at last he gave a sort of nod ; and Nowell, who quite understood the circumstances, took my arm, and wheeled me round, and I began to observe the rest of the company. But each in his turn. You can leave this unread if you like. I have nothing to do, no other news to give you, and it amuses me to write it, so I shall go on till I have done.

“ “ Mrs. Robson — Mr. Lawford,” said Nowell ; and I bowed myself before an elderly woman, in whose grey countenance, and hair like unto it, all the conventionality, and dulness, and ultra-respectability of the whole set seemed to be concentrated, as salient characteristics are concentrated in a type. When I saw her my heart sank. She wore a black silk gown and a white lace cap ; and I think if one had wanted to give a name to the thing of which she was the expression, “ rigidity ” is the word one would

have chosen. I almost expected her to say "Hoh!" too; perhaps all the company might say it. But she did not; she held out her hand, and though she did not manage to conjure up a smile, she did say, "How do you do, Mr. Lawford? We are much obliged to you for coming." I responded to the effect that I was happy to be of service in any way. I concluded from her words that, whether relation or housekeeper, Mrs. Robson was the mistress of the house; for, I must tell you, Hugh Nowell had never mentioned a relation to me, except his grandfather; and, for aught I knew, he might live alone with this engaging old man. Nowell then, with undisturbed solemnity of demeanour, wheeled me off once more, to the other side of a round table, at which two young ladies were sitting. They were both dressed in white, and one of them, as I soon discovered, was a bride.

“Mrs. Roper—my cousin, Miss Nowell—Mr. Lawford,” said Hugh; and then he loosed my arm, and I knew that I was to be spared introductions to the rest of the company. The bride smirked; “my cousin, Miss Nowell,” first gave a steady look at me; then shot a glance at Hugh, and her lips gave a queer little twitch, as if she would have liked to burst out laughing; after which she cast her eyes down, and maintained silence.

“My brother was *so* sorry he couldn’t come,” the bride said to Nowell; and I heard her in a sort of dream, my attention being otherwise occupied, as I will explain to you.

“We are sorry not to see him,” said Hugh.

‘I took the intensest dislike on the spot to this wretched bride, though it was only later in the evening that I was able to give my undivided attention to her. I wish you

could have seen her. She was very stout, and I suppose what you would call pretty, in a florid, full-blown common style—dark hair and eyes, and red cheeks, like one of Etty's sirens, and about as attractive to me. Said hair fluffed out over her far from intellectual forehead in front, piled high behind, and bound stoutly together by ropes of pearls. Diamonds she wore in great abundance; likewise lace, likewise satin, with an extensive display of bust and red, stout arms—general effect, too much stuff in the skirt of her gown, and far too little in the body of the same, with appearance of bursting out of her garment on all sides; a horrid, imbecile smirk, and affectations enough to sicken you; a high, mincing voice, which thousands of pounds worth of jewellery could never have sweetened—altogether, a loathly spectacle to me. She went on smirking and talking to Nowell the uttermost nothings, and he raised

his eyebrows, and cast down his eyes, and did the civil as well as he could.

‘But, to tell the truth, I did not discover all these seductive bridal charms until much later in the entertainment ; though, when I had beheld them, they made, as you will have seen, a vivid impression upon me. I saw them now as in a glass darkly, for I was so bewildered and so lost in astonishment at the aspect of “my cousin, Miss Nowell,” that I felt feeble with surprise. I had no idea that Hugh had such a relation. How he could live daily with her, and never speak of her, is a great mystery to me. I have knocked about in a good many places, and in all sorts of company, but I am quite serious when I say that nowhere, be it in “Greece, Italy, or England,” not to mention the tropics or the antipodes, did I ever see a face that I thought so beautiful. And the odd part of it is that none of them seemed to know in

the least what sort of a creature they had amongst them. Such a face cannot be described ; it is itself. But you will know the style of it if I tell you that it is pale, with the true *morbidezza* pallor ; and grand—not pretty or beautiful, and nothing else—with a certain antique, classical grandeur, but living, not marble. I would not answer altogether for the sweetness and reasonableness of the nature under that magnificent gloomy mask of a face—but as a mask, it is enough to set any number of men raving. Eyes, of I don't know what colour—the colour of midnight, I suppose—a violet, not a black midnight ; and hair, waving, thick, and abundant, to match. A fine, sculptured sort of throat, and delicate little ears, like shells, in delightful contrast to those of the bride, and a figure which I call perfect, on the slender side of fulness.

‘It is all very fine to catalogue her

beauties in this way, one by one, but I feel somewhat as if I committed sacrilege in doing so; and besides, it gives no idea of the breathing girl—the living woman. I said she was in white too; I wonder the bride had not the sense to go and sit in another corner, and not place herself in such close and disastrous proximity to Miss Nowell. Her gown was one of those soft, creamy, Oriental silks—you know the kind I mean, which you can crush up in your hand, and they never rustle nor crease. In exquisite contradistinction to that of its neighbour, this gown was high, and plain, and had little gathers or folds—your feminine experience will supply you with the name of the thing—up to her beautiful throat and down to her lovely elbows, with a silver belt round her waist. She had a coral necklace round her neck, and coral pins in her dusky hair, and long yellow gloves on, but no

bracelets nor any horrid shining things about her. I cannot describe the extraordinary effect of her appearance amongst these Philistines—like a Sphinx amongst a set of domestic animals, or a she-eagle brooding in the midst of a flock of barnyard fowls. Where she came from, how she got there, by what miraculous chance she is the granddaughter of the embodied Snarl of whom I have spoken, was such a mystery to me, that it troubled me and worried me. And how it was that Hugh had never so much as mentioned her—unless, indeed, there exists a reason for his silence, which I could easily imagine, I cannot tell. There was a vacant chair beside her, and I took it, and made some observation to her; I think I uttered the meaningless and preposterous untruth that Nowell and I had nearly lost our way in the fog.

“ I thought you lived close by—Hugh



said so," she remarked, in a rather low and decidedly contralto voice, which seemed to reprove the bride's wiry tones.

"So I do, in Barton Street," said I, resolving to let her know at once that it was not from any more distinguished quarter that I came.

"Then you must both have been very foolish if you could possibly lose your way in coming here from there, unless you did it on purpose," she said, with tranquil contempt. I did not care for that. I had got her to say something, and I took no notice of her disdainful indifference, but said people might do a good many rather stupid things when they were in a great hurry.

"Do you mean that you were in a hurry to get here?" she asked, measuring me with her eyes in a way that said clearly, "You can say so if you like, but I shall certainly not believe you." And then her glance wandered

---

round to the rest of the guests, and mine followed it, while I said :

‘ “ No ; but Hugh was, to get me here.”

‘ She gave a little laugh, and in a momentary silence I observed a middle-aged man with a bluff-looking countenance, and a stiff air of one unaccustomed to evening dress ; also two more ladies, both middle-aged, and both dressed in much barbaric splendour of gold of Ophir and diamonds of Golconda. Then dinner was announced, and Nowell, seizing hold of me, hurried me off to one of these women, whom he called Mrs. Magson, and told me to take her to dinner. Then he fled back to the bride, found time to whisper something to his cousin, to which she gave a little nod—I thought it was odd if he had no understanding with her—and with a brave face he led his fair one off ; old Nowell came last, supported by Mrs. Robson. Nowell did host’s duty, in the

matter of taking the head of the table and doing the honours. I soon discovered that my lady was the wife of the man who had failed to put in an appearance. It didn't seem to have occurred to her that the proper thing would have been for her to stop away too ; but I was not sorry for that, as it had at any rate given me the opportunity of seeing this extraordinary entertainment and the people at it, including Miss Nowell. But it waxes late, and my pen drops from my fingers. Good-night, Katty. I will go on to-morrow.'





## CHAPTER II.

### THE SAME TO THE SAME.

**A**S I said, Mrs. Magson's want of acquaintance with the rules of etiquette had given me a place at the table, just opposite to Miss Nowell, so that I saw her admirably ; and the bride, I am thankful to say, was far away, beside the devoted Hugh, and on my side of the table, so that I didn't see her at all. I could not keep my eyes from this girl's face. The beauty and the melancholy of it grew upon me ; and every time I looked at her, she seemed to start with ever fresh splendour and loveliness from the mass of

deadly commonplace which framed her in on every side. You will say, it does not in the least follow from her looks that she was not as commonplace as the rest of them. I know it need not follow; but it is a fact that she is not in the least like the rest of them. The conversation was almost entirely about local and district matters—about “our chapel,” and “our minister,” and “our committee.” Mrs. Magson enlarged upon them all, and gave me the history of the whole church. Old Nowell is a strict Wesleyan Methodist, cut and dried, and has given, she told me, “sums of money” to “our chapel.” You know the sort of people—Dissenters, absolutely rolling in money, and with their ideas of how either to spend or to save the same in an enlightened manner, in a state of chaos, neither more nor less. There was barbaric splendour of jewels which duchesses might have coveted, together with a strong

feeling against theatrical entertainments, as sinful. The remarkably *décolletée* toilette I have spoken of, with every air of mincing and *minauderie* imaginable, appeared not incompatible with a conviction that all card-playing, from a friendly rubber downwards, was gambling, and an invention of the evil one. But, though I gathered things like this, I had yet to learn the strength of the reserve force in the shape of Philistinism, dulness, utter absence of any sense of the ridiculous, and any appreciation of the fit and appropriate, which this company had concealed in the background. After I had let Mrs. Magson discourse for a long time on bazaars, and on what "our minister, Mr. Partington," thought about them, and after I had heard of the winter tea-parties, Dorcas meetings, and sales of work, I tried to edge gradually round to this girl, and get to know something about her. I had tried books and

music, but in vain. They didn't read novels ; her girls were growing up, and she wished to turn their minds to more serious things. They didn't go as a rule to the Grand Concerts—didn't altogether care for the style of music there ; and they had a good deal of music, and performances and concerts connected with the chapel, and so forth. So, as I found most legitimate subjects of small talk, literally, *religiously* barred to me, I fell back upon gossip, which, with its sister, scandal, can always effect an easy entrance into this sort of society, as we both know, my dear, don't we ? I said, though of course I knew better, that I supposed Miss Nowell was Hugh's sister.

“ “ Oh dear no ! ” said Mrs. Magson, interested at once. “ She's his cousin, the daughter of a younger brother of Hugh's father.”

“ “ Are the fathers both dead ? ” I asked.

“Yes; both. Some people think Mr. Nowell treated his sons very hardly. I admit he was severe, but I think he had a right to be.”

“Ah! I always think it wants a good deal of justification for a father to treat his sons harshly.”

“Yes, perhaps it does. But still—you see, they both objected to the business. They wanted to go their own way. And it must have been a blow to him when one of them said he would be a lawyer, and the other a—*soldier*—Mr. Lawford.”

“Is there anything so corrupt and bad about a soldier—of necessity, I mean?”

“Oh, it’s a shocking class, the military. All our principles go against them. My father always used to say he’d rather see me in my grave than married to a soldier.”

‘I reflected that this and similar opinions were prevalent amongst a certain class, so



I drove on in search of more tangible information, and said :

““ Had Miss Nowell and her cousin been brought up together ?”

““ No ; she’s only been here for the last four years. Hugh has lived with his grandfather ever since he was eight years old, but Peril’s father——”

““ Peril !” I echoed. And I could not help looking at her again. She did not hear us, I am sure. I don’t even know if she saw us, but her eyes seemed to be fixed upon us with a far-off gaze. The bridegroom had fallen to her share as a partner, and she did not seem to appreciate his society ; while I should say, judging from his choice of a wife, if he did choose her, poor man ! he must have been equally unable to appreciate hers. He was literally buried in his dinner, and her splendid face was, as I said, turned towards us, with a look of unfathomable

sorrow in her great eyes. I turned mine aside, feeling guilty, and Mrs. Magson observed :

“ Oh, you evidently know nothing about her.”

“ Mrs. Magson was stout and red ; she wore brown satin and fine lace, and ornaments of cat’s-eyes and diamonds. If the right woman had worn that gown everyone would have said what perfect taste she had ; but the wearer was Mrs. Magson, and the effect was melancholy. Still, let me tell you, Mrs. Magson was honest, in her way—nothing of the sham about her, and I could talk to her without feeling revolted.

“ No,” said I, “ I don’t. I wish you would tell me.”

“ Her father,” said Mrs. Magson, “ married a yeoman’s daughter—quite a small yeoman—and he ” (she glanced towards our

host) "was so enraged at the degradation of it, that he cast him off."

" " Being descended from princes himself," I murmured.

" " No ; he began life as an office boy," she said, in the most perfect innocence of any satirical intention on my part. " He gave him a small allowance, and for a while he stopped in England with his bride's relations, at some little out-of-the-way place called Wiswell, in Yorkshire." (I started—it is sad, Katty ; odd, I fancy I have heard the name, but it is so long since we had any connection with Wiswell that I can't recollect about it.) " Then they set off for South America. I never could quite make out why. I think he'd heard of some place in Rio, or something. His wife went with him. On the voyage"—her voice dropped ; even Mrs. Magson could not succeed in telling this part of her tale otherwise than impres-

sively—"the poor young woman gave birth to a child—the child who has grown into that girl opposite to you. It was an awful thing, I have heard; a fearful storm was raging, and they were all in peril of their lives. But the storm went down at last; the vessel was saved; the baby lived, but the mother died. The father was frantic, and, they say, could not bear to look at the child. It was baptized by the ship's chaplain; and when young Nowell was asked what its name was to be, he at first refused to name it, because he said its advent had ruined his life. They wanted to call it Marion, after its mother; but he said never should any such ill-starred child bear her beloved name. The chaplain reproved him, and bade him remember what perils they had been delivered from—perhaps even the child's mother, in that God had seen fit to remove her. He only laughed, and said

they did not know what they were talking about; and that as peril seemed to be the order of the day, Peril they might call the child, and nothing else would serve him. Peril she was baptized, and Peril she is to this day."

" "Did he use her unkindly?"

" "Not to call unkindly. He simply didn't care anything about her. As soon as he could, after he'd got work, he put her into a convent school at Rio, with some nuns, whom he paid to take charge of her altogether. But he never settled down. He got restless and dissatisfied; and at last he joined the army in one of the risings, and got killed in a skirmish. Then they sent for this girl, and found her, at about fifteen, with these nuns, learning things their way, you know—very ignorant of everything except Popish superstitions" (I suppose such things as Wesleyan Methodist superstitions do not

exist !), "and they brought her home to civilize and *Christianize* her, if they could."

'I could not help thinking that Christianity and civilization, as recommended to her by Ebenezer and Ebenezer's congregation, must have proved irresistible to this poor, gloomy-looking Peril. How she must have cast aside the cold and unlovely practices of the Roman Catholic Church, to embrace the warm and loving, and above all, beautiful substitute offered to her! I looked at them all—Mrs. Robson, in rigid propriety, seated beside old Nowell, whose head was sunk between his shoulders, and who addressed no one, and was solely occupied with the simple dish which he was allowed to eat; Hankinson, the manager, dull and conventional; the bride in her rampant vulgarity; the bridegroom; good Mrs. Magson herself; Hugh—my eyes fell upon him. He is very handsome, and has a natural distinction of

manner ; he is quick, impulsive, with an infectious laugh ; and I suppose, if he were lovemaking, would be as earnest about that as about the necessity for manhood suffrage, and for abolishing the House of Peers. A question slipped from my tongue before I had time to think what I was saying.

‘ “Will she marry her cousin ?” I asked.

‘ Mrs. Magson screwed up her mouth and shook her head. The question interested her, almost as much as it did me.

‘ “I can’t tell. It would be very natural if they fell in love with each other, thrown together as they are. But I don’t know what Mr. Nowell would say to such a thing. He has great ideas of founding a family. I should fancy he would want Hugh to marry well ; and likely enough he will leave all his money to him, and an annuity, or a small fortune, or something like that, to Peril. But I really don’t know. She is something

of an interloper, you know, poor thing ! and I often feel sorry for her. Her grandfather does not care for her, and she was worse than unwelcome to *one* member of the family."

" "Not Hugh, surely ? He would never be so ungenerous——"

" "Oh no ; not Hugh—Mrs. Robson is the person I mean."

" "Ah—h !" I could not help saying ; and it flashed upon my mind that Peril's trials and provocations might be more than tongue could tell, if Rigidity wanted to squeeze her into the shape she thought good.

" "Who is Mrs. Robson ?" I asked.

" "They call her 'Aunt Agatha'—the young ones—but she's really a sort of distant cousin of Mr. Nowell's, a widow who came to keep house for him after his wife died, nearly twenty years ago."

"I did not like to pursue the subject



further — indeed, I felt as if I had got enough to think about, as it was. The dinner, which was a very grand one and must have cost a mint of money, waxed ever longer, duller, drearier. The conversation was full (if that isn't a bull) of awful gaps and pauses. No one seemed as if he or she was really glad to see anyone else. It simply was what Hugh had told me—a feed, to keep in good temper some rich and powerful business connections of old Nowell's, who would probably reward him in the course of time with a similar feed in return for his. There was no pretence of any social aim in it. The ladies at last went away. I succeeded in getting to the door before Nowell, and in opening it. And I took a look at Peril as she swept out.

‘The conversation immediately became much more brisk ; it turned upon stocks,

shares, the money-market, and similar topics. A broad Lancashire, or rather Darkingford accent; an extreme scarcity of *h*'s; the repeated expression by the talkers of their settled conviction that "the value of a thing is what it'll *fetch*, ya' know"—these were the characteristics of the discussion. I reflected that as I should most likely never be asked there again, I might as well make the most of my chances now, so after a time I deserted the men, and found my way upstairs to the drawing-room.

'You will be getting tired of this, so I will cut it short. Peril was sitting apart. The other women were talking over the everlasting chapel affairs, which I suppose are as much to them as her balls and routs and assemblies to a woman of fashion. I sat down beside Miss Nowell, though the bride smirked sweetly upon me. This is not a delusion of inordinate vanity on my part.

She did, and Miss Nowell said to me in a low voice :

“Don’t you see Mrs. Roper wants to speak to you? Why don’t you go to her?”

“Because I would rather not,” I said ; upon which a gleam of a sort of dry amusement came into her eyes, and she said :

“What a delightful time Hugh must have had with her at dinner. I did not look at him, or I should have laughed, and you will have seen by now that we don’t meet together to do anything so silly as that.”

“Perhaps you and Hugh get your laugh afterwards?” I suggested.

“She nodded and smiled—a smile which showed her white teeth, and went over her face like a flash of sunshine. “Lucky dog !” I thought, and I understood that he might easily enjoy these laughs “afterwards” so much that he didn’t care to talk about them.

Still, that he had never mentioned her at all !

““ Have you known Hugh long ?” she asked me.

““ Ever since I came to Darkingford, nearly six months now.”

““ Ah ! and do you—oh ! now, Mr. Lawford, you will begin to enjoy yourself. We are going to have prayers now, do you see ? We are a very religious family, and so united !”

‘ And indeed, my dear Katty, the climax of the entertainment now arrived. The other men came into the room. Old Nowell was tired—his snarling aspect was more strongly marked than ever. Hugh alone bore the faintest resemblance to a gentleman. The other men were red in the face—not at all elevated, mind you, but full of wine and dinner, and with echoes of the yarn-market and the Stock Exchange still linger-

ing in their talk. And directly after their appearance a maid-servant entered, bearing in her hands the confirmation of Miss Nowell's promise—a very large Bible and a book of prayers of a more moderate size, bound gorgeously in brown morocco—and no one seemed surprised. Mrs. Robson, in a matter-of-fact voice, requested Mr. Hankinson, the manager, to “favour them,” which he did, reading a peculiarly vindictive Psalm, in which he consigned his enemies, and all them that hated him without a cause—of whom I am sure I am proud to call myself one—to torture and perdition. This was followed by a prayer that *He* would bless all their undertakings, mercantile, social, and domestic, including, I suppose, dinner-parties, brides, and all the rest of it, at 61, Great North Street; and “soon after this was over, the company dispersed.”

‘Anything so extraordinary and so repul-

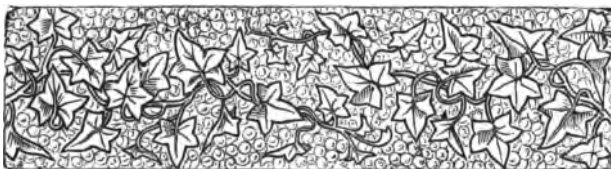
sive as this dragging together of worldliness and other-worldliness, and tying them in the same string in spite of their pulling strongly in such different directions, I never saw. I did not know whether to burst out laughing, or to sit and gape helplessly, with vacant eyes and mouth. These prosperous, money-grubbing men, with not two ideas in their heads beyond lucre—buying in the cheapest market, and selling in the dearest—with, for reward, the means to give a mighty feed like the one we had partaken of, and to cover their wives with pearls and diamonds ; these women (you may strike Peril from them, and Hugh from the men ; he has something else in his head than the scraping up of pelf), in silks and satins and jewels, full of sectarian pride, vulgarity, and an ignorant and timid exclusiveness and fear of all who differed from them or went to the chapel over the way—every thought concen-

trated on the here below ; and then this loathly formality of remembering their Creator—I have not got over it yet. It all seems like a dream. Kiss my lad for me, and tell him his dad thinks of him by day and by night. I kiss you too, and send my greetings to Woodfall.

‘ Ever your brother,

‘ PAUL.’





## CHAPTER III.

### IN THE PARK.

**T**WO days after he had despatched this voluminous letter to his sister, Paul Lawford turned out of his lodgings in Barton Street, and took his way towards Mr. Nowell's house in Great North Street. As he had said to his sister, it was scarce five minutes' walk from where he lived, although the two houses, and, thought Paul as he penned the remark, the two conditions, incomes, sets of circumstances also, were so entirely dissimilar. Lawford, in making this call, was perfectly well aware that he was doing a thing which



no one expected of him. Nowell himself, as he knew, was friendly enough with him, the other members of the family—his cousin, grandfather, and Mrs. Robson, had probably not bestowed a thought upon him since his visit. He was perfectly conscious that he had been fully and freely accepted and looked upon as the stray young man, useful to fill up a place which it would have been impertinent to invite a person of position to occupy—a stop-gap, a ‘friend of Hugh’s,’ whom nobody asked about, and nobody wanted to see again. He had this conviction very strongly—latent if unexpressed; and yet, despite this, and despite the fact that he carried a very sensitive spirit under his lazily indifferent exterior, he was sallying forth this afternoon, to make the regulation call: partly because it was the regulation thing to do, and he had no objection to let these uncultivated Nowells know it; and

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partly, though he had scarcely owned it even to himself, on the chance of seeing Peril Nowell again—because her face, and her eyes, and her shape, as she moved or sat still, had haunted him ever since the night on which he had first seen her. Let it be understood that this was all. He had not sent his thoughts any further. He was exceedingly poor, and his indifference was but a cleverly-worn veil to conceal a great deal of pride ; not the sort of pride that is afraid or ashamed of work, but that which would not make the semblance of an effort to mix with people like these, much richer than he was, profoundly ignorant, and inordinately set up with their riches. He was quite aware that, though Hugh Nowell was his friend, yet that the Nowell set in general would look upon him as but one degree removed from pauperism, and as deserving of all the pains and penalties attendant upon such a condi-

tion. He had the chance of seeing this girl again, and of getting a little amusement and a little pleasure from an interview with her, and he was disposed to avail himself of the chance ; and that was his sole motive in going there this afternoon.

He went up to the door of 61, Great North Street, and pulled the bell. Almost before it had begun to ring, the door was suddenly opened, and he was confronted by Peril Nowell herself, dressed for walking. She had a sort of satchel in her hand, and must have been in the act of opening the door when he rang.

She paused when she saw Lawford, and said :

‘ Oh !’

‘ I am afraid I am unfortunate. You are just going out ?’

‘ Why, have you come to see me ?’ she asked, deliberately and gravely, as she fixed

her eyes upon him with inquiry, but without surprise. A servant had appeared in answer to Lawford's ring, but seeing the two talking together, she retired.

'Yes, partly,' said Paul, who, with a certain instinct, perhaps more one of self-defence than anything else, took the tone of being quite careless and indifferent to her. 'I simply came to call here, after your party the other night.'

'Oh yes, I see! The Darkingford men are generally in their offices at this time of day. Mrs. Robson, who will appreciate your attention, I am sure' (with a smile, which, as he could not help seeing, was more malicious than genial), 'is upstairs, with grandpapa. Would you like to see her?'

'If she is at liberty,' he began steadily, and, as he flattered himself, honourably passing by any opportunity for paying a compli-

ment, or suggesting that he preferred her company to that of Mrs. Robson.

‘Oh, she is quite at liberty. You can spend the whole afternoon with her, if you like. I should think, though, that a walk would do you a great deal more good. I am going to Southfield Park with this bag. You may come with me, and carry it, if you like ; *or* you may go upstairs, and see Mrs. Robson and grandpapa. Which will you do ?’

‘I will go with you, thanks,’ said Paul promptly, and resolved, whether she expected it or not, to show no astonishment, nor any signs of being flattered by the invitation. He had a deep inner sense that the girl’s strange name was not altogether inappropriate to her nature, and that to play with her, in any way, might involve dangerous consequences.

‘I thought you would,’ she replied tranquilly, as she pulled a bell in the hall ; and he

decided within his own mind that this was the first stroke of luck he had had since coming to Darkingford. It might be the precursor of more ; the queen of trumps might have turned up at last, and his misfortunes be coming to an end. If she were a coquette, she was a magnificent one ; but he did not feel at all sure that she was anything of the kind.

‘ Please go to Mrs. Robson,’ she said to the maid who came to her, ‘ and tell her that I shall walk both ways this afternoon, as Mr. Lawford is going with me.’

Despite his resolutions, he found it difficult not to look a little surprised. She came out, the servant closed the door, and in a few minutes they were on their way to Southfield. It was a fine afternoon ; copious rain had cleared away both frost and fog. Old February was going to fulfil his cognomen of ‘ Filldyke,’ and though there was a

lingering rawness in the air, yet the breath of the oncoming spring was the stronger of the two, even in the town. As pleasant an afternoon, for a change, as could be wished.

Lawford took the bag, which she committed to his charge with a rather distrustful look.

‘Isn’t it heavy?’ she remarked. ‘I knew you would be surprised. You must be very careful of it, for there are sundry articles of food in it—invalid’s food, such as jelly and so on—and they are going to a sick child, living in a dismal little street where I told you, on the other side of Southfield Park.’

‘And are you obliged to carry these things? Would you not have driven if I had not met you?’

‘I should most likely have taken omnibuses—one way at any rate; not because I like it, but because it is dark when I get home if I

walk both ways, and Hugh goes on like a maniac if he finds out that I do it.'

'I don't wonder,' said Lawford, inwardly wondering how much right Hugh had to go on like a maniac about it.

'I'm surprised to hear you say that. I should have thought you had more sense,' was the reply. 'Are you one of the people who think that if girls have not got some one to go out with them, they must always stop in?'

'Not at all; but I should say he was right in not liking you to be out alone after it is dark.'

'I can't enter into such an idea at all,' she said coldly; 'but the real reason why I like to walk both ways is that it is a long way off, and keeps me for a long time out of that house.'

She glanced behind her with a look of aversion which was significant to him. They



were now well on their way to Southfield Park, a large piece of ground laid out as a public garden, in one of the suburbs of Darkingford. When first opened, some eight years ago, it had been comparatively in the country ; now the great town was stretching up to it, and around it in every direction, as if threatening to swallow it bodily in its smoky jaws ; but it remained a pleasant oasis of grass, and flower-beds, and shrubberies, ponds, terraces, and trees, of a sort. It was full two miles from Great North Street, as Lawford knew ; and he felt pleasantly exhilarated by the prospect of the long walk with this particular companion.

‘ You do not care for the people in “ that house,” as you call it ? ’ he said.

‘ I hate everyone in it, except Hugh,’ was the comprehensive reply. And while he was framing some sort of a diplomatic answer to it, which was not easy, she broke in abruptly,

‘You say you have known him about six months?’

‘Yes.’

‘What do you think of him?’

‘I think he is a very clever, good-hearted lad, who will make a fine man when he has had time to learn his lesson a little.’

‘A lad—and what lesson?’ she asked. There was indignant expostulation in the way in which she said ‘a lad.’ ‘Surely,’ she added, ‘a person ought to be a man at twenty-five, which is Hugh’s age.’

‘I don’t know what he ought to be ; but, as a matter-of-fact, he is very often, as I said, a lad at that mature age. Of course there are great exceptions, but I don’t think Hugh is one. And all the better for him, I say.’

‘He has always seemed to me very like a man,’ said Peril musingly. Lawford saw that she was deeply interested in the subject, and began to have a feeling of pique.

‘And what lesson do you mean?’ she added.

‘I meant the lesson of life. It is one that we all have to go through, I suppose.’

‘I am sure Hugh has had lessons enough of that kind already. Grandpapa is one of the people who are always making rules, usually beginning, “Thou shalt *not* do so and so.” He has made rules for Hugh till I wonder he does not throw something at him, put on his cap, and walk away, never to come back again.’

‘I suppose you would applaud such a course?’ suggested Paul drily. ‘I hope he does not take your advice in the matter much; else, it seems to me, his prospects would be no better than my own.’

‘Some old people find pleasure in letting young ones enjoy themselves,’ Peril pursued; ‘at least, I have heard so. I am not sure whether I believe it. I don’t think I do.’

I can only speak about Grandpapa Nowell from my own experience, and all the pleasure we get out of him is what we secure by circumventing him when he gets beyond everything.'

'You combine, then, to circumvent him?'

'Oh yes; we used to have no end of fun by doing it, and getting nearly found out. Once Hugh had a supper-party. Grandpapa was up in his room, very poorly and very deaf, as he always is when his throat and chest are bad. We were carefully concealing everything about this supper-party, and it was all to go on in the lower rooms, when a most horrible idiot of an elderly lady came to call, and was taken upstairs to see grandpapa. I don't know why—not to put him in good spirits, I should think, for she was deplorable to look at. I happened to go into the room, and heard her saying to grandpapa, "I hope the young people will enjoy

themselves to-night." I was horror-struck. "What?" cried grandpapa; "do speak louder—I can't hear!" "I hope the young people will have a pleasant party." He did not hear, but looked angrily at me and said, "What does she say?" I made a most awful face at her behind his chair, and went and shouted in his ear, "Miss Sedgwick thinks you're looking much better since she saw you last," which opened her eyes considerably. We were always having escapes of that kind.'

'But suppose he had known of the supper-party? What would he have done?'

'Raged himself nearly into a fit, till we had sent back word to everybody,' said Peril indifferently. 'But Hugh goes out so much now, we don't have so many jokes of that kind, and it is frightfully dull.'

'I should think so,' said Paul sympathetically. 'But you have friends, I dare

say, like Hugh, whom you can go to see ?’

‘Not one,’ was the bitter cold reply. ‘All the people they know are like those you saw the other night—delightful people to have for friends, don’t you think ? Mrs. Roper told me she would be charmed if I would go and see her, and the inducement she offered was that we could do crewel-work together.’

‘Bah !’ said Lawford.

‘Fancy how richly I should have felt rewarded, when I had covered all the drawing-room chairs with kitchen towelling adorned with bad imitations of fruit and flowers in wool,’ continued Peril, with a sardonic laugh ; ‘not to mention the advantages to be derived from Mrs. Roper’s society and conversation.’

‘Mrs. Magson seems a kindly sort of woman.’

‘She is very kind indeed ; her kindness to

me is wonderful, considering what a poor, darkened creature I am—a Papist, she thinks. Do you know that when I go there, she will not leave her daughters alone with me ?

‘What an idiot !’

‘I wonder what she would say if I told her that I didn’t care two straws for religion—Popish or Protestant ; and not one for her daughters, except that their ignorance amuses me. I like to hear them talking about missionaries ; the youngest one is in love with a missionary, but though she is a Protestant she keeps it quiet, and is acting lies every day of her life to her father and mother, who wish her to marry a young man with red hair and two large cotton factories of his very own.’

‘Then the missionary has not got red hair ?’

‘He is romantic-looking, very. She showed me his likeness ; because it seems he once

went to Rio, and being such a very distinguished character, and Rio such a very small village, she thought I could not have failed to see him. I reminded her that I was shut up in the convent school, studying Popish superstitions, and she screwed up her mouth, and made her eyes round, and said, "Ah, yes!" and that if Edward—that is his name—could have seen me, he might have "snatched me from the burning."

'Not interesting society, I must confess.'

'It is all that I can have, and it is Grand-papa Nowell's doing. Oh, he is a wicked old man! I do hate him!'

Lawford hardly liked to glance at her as she said this, in a tone of anger, bitter and intense, though suppressed. This unexpected walk with her was not so delightful, after all. He had disliked the elder Nowell heartily enough, but he was a man, and could feel a certain amount of sympathy with him on



points whose very nature would have been a mystery to Peril, whose angry, disappointed girlhood saw only the personal injury—so he thought just now—and was blind to the possible existence of another side to the case. He thought of the old man—ill and weak, languishing in enforced inactivity; impotent to meddle more in the concerns which were dearest to him, and he thought Peril's judgment a harsh one.

‘I thought Hankinson, the manager, had some family,’ he said.

‘He has a daughter. I scarcely know her; she is one of those strong-minded women, I think, and twenty-seven years old, and “serious.” I hate such people. Hugh goes there sometimes, and they talk about all sorts of things—politics and social things. I must have told hundreds of fibs to grand-papa to keep him from knowing that Hugh goes there.’

‘But why does he object?’

‘Because he hates Radicals; and Miss Hankinson is a great Radical. You see, he was once a working-man and a Radical himself; now he hates working-men, and says Radicals are fools, who would let trades unions have everything their own way, and run wages up, till people like him would be ruined. He would go wild, and be fit to disinherit Hugh, if he knew that he had taken up with any such ideas. Somebody once kindly told him—Mrs. Magson, in her benevolent way, I think it was—a long tale about Miss Hankinson’s enormities; she must be a monster, you know, because she never enters the doors of Ebenezer, like me. He is obliged to keep Mr. Hankinson, because he is such a splendid manager; but, as you would see the other night, Mr. Hankinson was alone. If he knew that Hugh belonged to a Democratic club, a place

where they have working-men for members, and want manhood suffrage, and all that, I am sure he would turn him out of doors. He would never trust him with his money.'

'And Hugh—how does he get on with him?'

'Oh, Hugh!' she said, lifting up her lip and her chin. 'He has known him all his life; he knows how to manage him.'

'I could not imagine him "managing" anyone.'

'Well, Hugh says his management consists of a policy of masterly inactivity. He does nothing, and says nothing; and so far it does not seem to have occurred to Grand-papa Nowell to suspect him. If he once did——'

'What?' asked Lawford, struck with something significant in her tone. And he looked at her.

Peril nodded her head slightly.

‘Why, it would be all over with Hugh’s prospects—that is all.’

‘Rather ticklish ground for you,’ observed Lawford; ‘suppose you inadvertently betrayed him.’

‘I could not betray him inadvertently,’ she replied, composedly, ‘for Hugh is the only one of them who ever showed me a gleam of kindness or affection; he has got me out of scrapes—he has smoothed things over for me; he has made Mrs. Robson behave herself decently to me, because he could make her go on her knees to tie my shoes if he chose. It is just Hugh who has made my life tolerable, bearable to me; and if my tongue spoke a syllable to betray him, if it refused to tell a hundred lies a day, if need be, for his service, why, it would deserve to be torn out and trampled upon!’

‘Ah!’ thought Lawford, while he silently paced beside her, ‘it is not just as I thought.

I imagined he must have lost his heart to her, and as a matter of fact she is over head and ears in love with him—and no wonder!’

‘I could not do Hugh a wrong inadvertently,’ Peril pursued, after a pause, as if she wished to impress the fact upon his mind. ‘You cannot do a thing inadvertently when the constant subject of your thoughts is not to do that particular thing. No; he may have enemies—they say no one is without them—but it is not through me that any harm will ever come to him.’

Her eyes lighted up; a smile, sweet and high, expanded on her face. This, he saw, the consciousness of this power and this trust it was, which kept her life endurable, as she had said.

‘Why,’ she resumed, with a candour that startled him, ‘even in my rages, I never for one moment forget to keep clear of anything that might damage Hugh.’

‘In your rages!’ echoed Paul, not sure whether to be most shocked or most amused at her *naïveté*.

‘Yes. When a storm rises in me—and it does very often—it must break out. It always does. I should go mad if it did not ;’ and she turned and looked at Paul, who in his turn looked at her.

He felt a pang of disappointment, after all. There is something fascinating and romantic about a beautiful girl who is unhappy, or poor, or ill-used ; but a beautiful girl who is very well off, and very bad-tempered—that is another thing ; and it was useless to blink the fact, which everything she said had borne in upon his mind more and more strongly—Peril Nowell had ‘a temper.’

‘What a queer girl she is!’ he thought. ‘I wonder what her object is in bringing me out and talking to me in this way. I can’t help her—I can’t do anything for her ; it

seems as if it were just that she might have the satisfaction of talking about her wrongs.'

What she said next helped to confirm him in this idea.

'Perhaps you will wonder what I can have to make me get into rages. I wonder myself, sometimes, because of course I know that you never get anything by rages; you only weaken yourself.'

'That is profoundly true, Miss Nowell. I wonder, if you know it so well, that you don't act upon it.'

'I can't. Do you always act upon what you know to be true? Does anybody? I think about things till I get nearly mad.'

She spoke in a bitter, low monotone, as if it was made known to her that she must say something; and she said it to the first person who came in her way. All the time that she was talking, Paul had a feeling that it was scarcely to him in particular that she spoke.

He happened to be there ; he could listen, and say 'yes' and 'no,' and she poured forth her tale without pausing for a moment to wonder whether it pleased him to hear it or not. For his part, he felt intensely interested, and very much disenchanted, but anxious to hear to the end.

'What kind of things can you have to think about, that make you feel like that?' he asked. 'Surely not the provoking ways of a cantankerous old man ; you, in your youth and strength, ought to be able to pass them over lightly.'

'Not just his provoking ways to me ; but I think of the past, and of all the wickedness that he has committed. There are nearer relations than grandfathers, and he has deprived me of mine. I had a father once, and a mother, whom I never saw. But for him, I might have had my father and my mother now, and known what it was to be



loved by them. I might have had brothers and sisters. I might have been a happy girl, instead of what I am.'

'You might have been a happy girl; then I suppose you mean that you are an unhappy one?'

'Yes, I am. How should I be happy? I could imagine myself happy, in certain circumstances which will never come to pass. But I am one of those objectionable people who are not born happy. Even if I had been, and had had everything bright and cheerful about me, I do not think I should be very happy. As it is, I have thoughts in my mind which might make anyone unhappy—the thought that that wicked old man destroyed my father, because he would not do just what he wanted him to—be a machine for making money, and nothing else. Then, my father became poor, and had to go abroad with his wife,

and she died. And because she died when I was born, my father hated me, and called me "Peril," and put me away from him, and left me with strangers. And because he did not care for me, or let me try to make up to him what he had lost, why, he threw it away—his life, I mean—and he died too, and left me alone : do you call these the sort of thoughts to make one happy ?

'They are thoughts which you ought never to have had,' said Paul, more moved than he would have cared to confess, and thinking, too : 'Poor thing ! she takes everything hard ; I'm afraid it's a bad look-out for her.' Aloud he went on : 'If I had had anything to do in such a matter—if you had been committed to my charge, I would never have let you know those facts ; or if I had, I would have taught you to see them differently.'

'Aha ! you are not Mrs. Robson, you

see,' said Peril, with such bitterness and such a sneer in her voice that Lawford began again to feel his interest grow even painful in its intensity. How she must have suffered, and how perfectly friendless she must be, to go on, bringing out one wrong after another, in this way, to him, to whom she had spoken once in her life !

'Mrs. Robson !' he echoed.

'Yes ; I wormed it all out of Mrs. Robson,' said Peril, with angry triumph in her voice. 'She was very willing to tell, I can assure you. You see, she hates me and loves Hugh ; she worships Hugh—adores him ; she would like to kick me into the street as a beggar ; she thinks it would be the most suitable calling for me.'

'Don't you think you exaggerate a little natural jealousy?' he said ; and he felt that, contrasted with her passionate earnestness, her bitterness and deeply burning resent-

ment, his interpolations sounded flat and commonplace ; but, after all, he did not see what there was, more original, to be said on the subject.

He wanted to hear her to the end ; so, like a Greek Chorus, he threw in a question or a comment now and then, when she made a pause in the sort of rhapsody with which she enumerated her wrongs.

‘ Do I *think* ? ’ she repeated contemptuously. ‘ What is the use of talking about thinking, when I *know* such things as I do ? I got it all out of her—all that he had said about my father, when he committed the crime of wanting to be a soldier and serve his country, instead of scraping up money in a counting-house—all that he said about my mother, who was good and beautiful, though she was but a poor farmer’s daughter. Her ancestors had lived for hundreds of years on the same soil, and tilled it. His—who knows what

slum or what alley *his* mother came from ? I heard all that he had said about my mother, and I heard—for she had learnt it by heart—the letter that my father wrote after his wife had died : it ought to have killed him with shame ; only, you see, that is a feeling which he is unable to experience. I pretended that I wished to understand my real position with regard to my grandfather, and she, though she hypocritically pretended that she wished to spare my feelings, gloated—oh, how she gloated in telling the tale !

‘I cannot understand how you could go through with such a task,’ he said, half-fascinated, half-revolted.

‘I did not falter over it. I wished to know what the people were amongst whom I was cast. I read her to the very soul then, and I have esteemed her since for what she is worth. How glad she would be if I died, or, better still, did something disgraceful or

offensive, so that grandpapa might turn me out of doors !'

'Your grandfather may be a very harsh, bad old man, but no man who is a man at all would ever do such a thing ; therefore Mrs. Robson's wishes are futile,' he interrupted, quite eager to throw his little vial of oil upon the troubled waves. She laughed.

'I have never thought about that. I think he would do anything if money came in question. She would like me to be cast out, and that her beloved Hugh might have it all. She would grudge me as much as a hundred a year to keep me from starving. I understood then, that as I had come into the world unwelcome, and had had to live loveless ever since, so here, where I was helpless and a stranger, it was to be the same, but worse. My father was never openly unkind to me. Sometimes he used to send me presents to school, which I never cared for, and the other

girls wondered why. When I told them that they were gifts of duty, not affection, and had no value in my eyes, they shook their heads, poor things! Chocolate was chocolate to them, and trinkets trinkets, in whatsoever spirit offered. The nuns were kind to me. I loved them best; I love them now. I would like to go back to them—at least, I think so sometimes.'

'You would not really,' he said, with conviction.

'No, I know I would not. I wonder how you can tell?' she added, glancing at him with a momentary curiosity; 'because I have twice got up in the middle of the night, intending to run away and go back to them—you must not tell Hugh that,' she went on quickly, and as if recollecting herself.

'Certainly not. You tried to run away?'

'Yes; and once, when I got to the foot of the stairs, something stronger than I was

drove me back. And the second time I had got out and gone down the street a little way, when a man met me, and took hold of my wrist——'

'Good God!' he ejaculated, feeling his face flame, 'you must have been mad to venture out.'

'I pushed him aside, and walked back. I felt afraid—quite sick. I went in again and cried, because I was not strong enough to do what I wanted.'

The recital of this last episode had moved Paul to a high pitch of painful interest. The fascination was now stronger than the repulsion he felt. It was destined to be increased immediately, for almost directly she showed him a glimpse of the softer side of her wild nature, which, as it were, bound him to her, in spite of himself.

'Hugh does not know that you did this?' he said.



‘No, no, no! How could I tell Hugh, when all the time he was being so kind to me, and trying to make things better for me? I said something stronger than I was drew me back the first time; it was the idea of what Hugh would think of me in the morning. He would have been broken-hearted. He does not like me, as I told you, to walk home alone after dark. If he had imagined me wandering about all night, he would have gone nearly mad. He is my one friend; can you wonder that I try to please him?’

‘The wonder would be, if you did not,’ said Lawford, and fell into a train of silent musing, which she did not interrupt for a little time.

A woman, even a good woman, might have seen more of Peril’s wilfulness, hardness, sullenness, and revengefulness than of the other side of the question: the present

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writer has heard a woman, good-hearted, clever, in a position of high rank in the educational world, say that there was one rule on which she always acted, and that was that when any girl came to a rupture with her relations, or failed to get on with her family, it was invariably the girl's own fault. This is a rule which would doubtless smooth one's way for one powerfully in dealing with such cases, and save much troublesome inquiry and investigation ; as to its soundness, a humble student of human nature may perhaps be allowed to express some doubts.

Paul Lawford, however, was not a woman holding a distinguished position in the educational world ; he was a young man of thirty-one, with a fine and sympathetic temperament, too fine and too sympathetic for him ever to achieve much success in a worldly point of view. He saw from his eyes and

out of his heart, and what he saw was a beautiful girl with an unhappy and gloomy nature, driven by stress of circumstances into a yet more unhappy condition than was hers by the inexorable law which ordains that when we come into the world, we come, not new coined, not independent and original beings, but compounded of the faults and failings, the vices and virtues inextricably blended of perhaps hundreds of those mighty dead who have such influence over the living. . Against these pitiless circumstances, her heart, hot and full of the keenest sensibilities, was battered constantly, each collision leaving it more mangled and more resentful than the last. To him it was a pitiable spectacle, and pity was exactly and almost entirely what he felt for her.

But as almost all tragedies are susceptible of being turned into burlesques—and the bolder their lines the more the scope for

making fun of them—so, Peril's passionate resentment and bitter grief were not without their grotesque side.

‘Hugh has a great idea of duty—obeying the voice of duty,’ she presently said. ‘I don’t know how you find out which is the voice of duty, or how you tell it from any other voice, unless you go in for believing that everything disagreeable is required by duty, and that everything else belongs to pleasure, and ought to be avoided.’

‘It’s a disputed point in ethics, and there have been a great many very thick and heavy books written about it. What is your view?’

‘Oh, I let duty alone; Hugh is welcome to it. And I quietly built my own little altar to my own goddess, and I offer a sacrifice to her now and then; but she knows the great one is yet to come, and she is waiting—more patiently than I am, I dare say.’

‘Waiting! for what?’ he asked.

‘For the great sacrifice, when it is ready. You must know I was given to understand that when grandpapa dies, I, if I had behaved myself discreetly in the meantime, would come in for some of his money—not much, I dare say. Hugh will get the most of it if nothing happens to make grandpapa quarrel with him; and it is fit that he should. I don’t want it—I hate it, but I may expect a little share. When I get it, I am going to take my revenge on him, and all his years of scraping, by spending it systematically in every way that I know would be abhorrent to him—in fal-lals, and fads and fripperies, and all kinds of vain things that he would loathe. I hope to make him turn in his grave; then, perhaps, I may begin to think of enjoying my life.’

She ceased to speak, and Lawford, though he smiled, did not answer her. Her feelings

were so tragic, her actions so childish and incomplete, her ideas of revenge at once so vindictive and so absurd. That was what one might expect, and there was something reassuring in the fact that it was so. Had her actions been commensurate with her feelings, he felt vaguely, though he did not put it into those words, fascination must have ceased, and repulsion taken possession of his mind. As it was, he could think, 'Poor child!' and feel that he was not altogether mistaken in his estimate of her.

They had been for some time pacing through the walks of the park, and they now arrived at its farther gates.

'I have to go out here,' she said; 'the cottage is three minutes' walk farther on. If you don't mind waiting on that bench, I will very soon rejoin you.'

He opened the gate for her, and she was

soon lost to his view in one of the small side streets. He seated himself upon the bench, to wait for her, and of course he thought about her all the time she was away.





## CHAPTER IV.

### A VAGABOND'S STORY.

**W**HILE she was absent Paul leaned forwards, and drew figures in the gravel with her umbrella, which she had left in his charge. He wished sincerely that she did not interest him so much. He had not got to the stage of being indifferent to anything, so long as he could be near her ; but he had got to that point at which she haunted him with a persistency which was almost irritating, just because he was not reckless. He would rather have been able to shake himself free from her influence ; he had sense enough to be



perfectly aware that to think of her much, or let her get any kind of power over him, sentimental or other, meant ruin for his peace of mind, and that so far as thinking of approaching her nearer, as a possible lover, went—so far as that was concerned, he and the man who was weeding the walk a few paces off, were practically on an equality. He might be her equal in manners, and her superior in mind; he might be in every respect suited to guide, and help, and command her; but what did such things, such qualities matter to people of the Nowell calibre, belonging to the Nowell clan? Nothing, and less than nothing. The red-haired youth with the two cotton factories would have been considered an eligible, perhaps a brilliant *parti*; if Paul Lawford came forward with such a proposal, it would be considered that he displayed presumption amounting to insolence. So he told himself,

in the little parley that he held with himself while she was absent, and felt a little bitter. The bitterness brought him to himself, like a tonic ; and he reminded himself that he was not required by any law or rule to play knight-errant to this distressed damozel. Indeed, the probability was, that the knight who, when the lists were thrown open, would come a-tilting with her colours pinned to his helm would be her cousin Hugh. She had betrayed, it might be unconsciously, but at any rate unmistakably, what her feelings were ; it would be something little short of a miracle, argued Lawford, if they were unreturned, if an ardent, generous, impulsive lad like Hugh Nowell had lived under the same roof with this girl for four years or more, and been linked to her by the close bond of a friendship in which he was her champion and protector, and had not fallen in love with her. It would be incredible,

and almost monstrous. The only argument he could think of, against the absolute certainty of such a thing was, that it seemed to settle things almost too easily and smoothly; more easily, more sanely and reasonably than, as a rule, complicated family disagreements were settled. And yet—she was so young, and had struggled against the burden of so great a trouble, so much lovelessness—it seemed fit and right, and probable too, that her unhappiness should at last be ended in this good and natural manner; that she should find her rest and her happiness in his arms who had been her friend and defender throughout these dreary years.

But Nowell? This was where, to Lawford's mind, the puzzle came in. What did his complete and unaccountable silence on the subject of his cousin mean? If it had been his own case, Paul could very well have understood it; he would not have cared to

mention a person whose love and whose troubles were so sacred as, in such a case, hers would have been. Perhaps the fact was, that Nowell was resolved to say nothing till after his grandfather's death, or until he had received some share in the business, which would enable him to carry things in his own way. That would account for it all, Lawford thought, with a feeling of satisfaction at having found so reasonable a solution to the puzzle, which was as strong as if it had been some matter personal and concerning himself. It was quickly followed by the other, and less satisfactory thought :

‘It would explain the puzzle, but it would not be in the least like Hugh Nowell as I know him.’

He felt vexed when he was forced to come to this conclusion ; he had a great desire, the strength of which surprised even himself, to know that something was going to be done,

or actually had been done, to make Peril happy, instead of wretched ; to put some sweetness into her life, instead of all that acrid bitterness and discontent. He felt as if he knew very well what she looked like under adverse circumstances ; he had a strong wish to see her in sunshine as well as under these lowering clouds. Perhaps it was reserved for Hugh Nowell to work this change. Was he really the right man to do it ?

Pondering thus, he was roused by her voice close beside him.

‘I’m here, back again. Have I been long ?’

‘No, I don’t fancy so. In any case, you commanded my attendance, and I can have nothing better to do than wait your convenience.’

‘I wonder if you mean to snub me with that,’ she said, sitting down beside him. ‘I

should not wonder if I have laid myself open to a snub. I expect Hugh would say I had been talking in a most wild and improper manner. I know I feel a great deal better for it, and I am much obliged to you for listening to me.'

'Don't mention it,' he conjured her politely.

'Mr. Lawford,' she said, and there was the grace of a slight hesitation in her manner and tone, which seemed scarcely to belong to the same girl as the one who had been pouring out her wrongs to him all the way hither, 'don't think me very impertinent; I don't mean to be, really. I don't know any proper manners. I want to ask you something.'

'Anything I can tell you——'

'No; don't say that. Perhaps you may not want to tell me. I shall quite understand if you say you won't.'

‘You rouse my curiosity.’

‘Well—please—what are you?’

‘What am I?’ he echoed, startled and ashamed of himself for feeling momentarily ashamed of his poor condition; ‘a vagabond, with no ostensible means of livelihood.’

‘Hugh doesn’t have vagabonds for his friends—and he thinks all the world of you.’

‘Much obliged to him, I am sure,’ said Lawford sarcastically. ‘That must put a sort of *cachet* upon me, for the relief of doubtful inquirers; but all the same, I am what I said—a vagabond.’

‘How did you come to be a vagabond?’

‘I never “came to be” one. The case is much more flagrant than you suppose, for I was born one. I am, as you might say, a vagabond by the grace of God.’

‘You are saying that to show me that I must not ask any more, so I won’t. You will forgive me if I was impertinent?’

‘There was nothing impertinent in it,’ he said, steadily avoiding looking at her, and still tracing complicated figures in the gravel. And then, suddenly remembering a remark of Mrs. Magson’s, which had been lying dormant in his recollection ever since it was made, he said: ‘Miss Nowell, did you ever hear of a place called Wiswell?’

‘Wiswell!’ Her whole face became transfigured, and her eyes blazed upon him. ‘My mother came from Wiswell. What do you know of it?’

‘Scarcely anything; I have been there once in my life, and all my people spring from there—that’s all.’

‘Oh, I imagined for one wild moment that you might have even—seen her,’ she said, in a low and awestruck voice.

Lawford was profoundly touched by this bright trait gleaming out of the darkness, as it were—this reverence and love for the very



name of the mother whom she had never seen ; whose love, could she have known it, might have made of her something very different from what she was.

‘ I often think of Wiswell, and wonder what it is like,’ she went on. ‘ My mother’s name was Wistar.’

‘ Ah ! there is a Mr. Wistar, a farmer, who lives at a queer old house called Stanesacre.’

‘ That is it—yes. That is my mother’s brother ; my uncle. He came in for part of the insults that were heaped by Mr. Nowell upon the whole family when his son married my mother. Stanesacre—it sounds bleak and barren, but I often wish to see it. My uncle Wistar has never taken any notice of me—it was not likely. Did you ever see him ? What is he like ?’

‘ I don’t know that I ever saw him. He is an old bachelor, I heard ; as comfortable

and substantial in his "stony acre" as we were the reverse in our damp old Grange.'

'But, Mr. Lawford, do tell me—tell me about yourself!' she implored him, her interest really roused at last; she viewed him no more as a vessel into which she could pour the story of her wrongs, but as an individual who could, if he would, tell her something about himself that should interest her.

'I fear I can tell you very little about myself that would be of the least interest to you,' he said slowly, feeling, to tell the truth, not much inclined to comply with her demand, or to lay bare to one so self-absorbed the story of his trials and his poverty, just in order to afford a few moments' gratification to a temporary, indifferent curiosity.

But Peril was persistent—he could have prophesied that—and gentle, which he would hardly have anticipated.

‘Were you born at Wiswell Grange?’ she asked. ‘I like the sound of it.’

‘No; I was born in a very prosaic house of a prosaic London suburb. My father was the younger brother; his elder inherited the old Grange, though it is mine now.’

‘Yours now! oh, don’t tantalize me, Mr. Lawford. How does it come to be yours? If you knew the interest I take in everything belonging to Wiswell!’

‘It came to be mine quite in the natural and proper way—through my uncle’s death. He was anything but a vagabond, allow me to tell you.’

‘I wish you would tell me what you mean by being a vagabond. I always think vagabonds are people who beg.’

‘Those are not only vagabonds, but rogues. I never got quite so low—or so high—since I am a vagabond, and begging is, as it were, the acme of vagabondism;

anyhow, I never got so far as that,' he said ; and then, finding that she did not seem at all scared by the 'vagabond' bogey, he plunged suddenly into an account of himself, thinking that her reception of it would at least give him another glimpse into her character—would reveal whether her proud and lofty bearing covered any of the pettifogging Nowell spirit, or whether she saw through the husk of things to the realities—the 'verities.'

'Poverty was what made us vagabonds,' he said. 'My father, as soon as ever he was earning enough to keep himself as an accountant in London—for you must understand that Wiswell Grange was only a humble little place, not the house of a 'great family' in any sense of the word—when my father was just keeping his own head above water, he persuaded my mother to join him, and they got married, and had two chil-

dren—my sister Katty and me; and they struggled on, very uncomfortably, and yet, according to my recollection, very happily. I've no doubt it is very immoral, and quite unlike the sort of people who constitute England's greatness and all that sort of thing, to be happy under circumstances of such dire poverty—but we were. My sister is a year older than I am, and an angel, if ever there was one. I can't remember my mother—she died when I was very young; but I have heard that it was she from whom my sister gets her graceful manners and her talent for painting. Her brave spirit belongs to herself; I am sure of that. At an early age, as soon as I had scrambled through some sort of an education, they put me into a place of business—a counting-house—in the City. I hated it; perhaps it was from my mother that I acquired that too. I always abominated business, and I

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dare say I never tried to do as I ought to have done.'

'But what ought you to have done? I am sure I don't know what a person ought to do when he is in a business that he hates—leave it, I should think.'

Paul laughed.

'If he is prepared to starve, certainly, he could take no better course. What I ought to have done was so plain and easy, and the results of not doing it so clearly to be read, that I must have been a reckless, bad young man, I am sure, to neglect such an obvious duty. I ought to have worked like a slave for twenty years, with a fortnight's holiday each year, and at the end of that time I should have had an exceeding great reward, in the shape of the magnificent income of two hundred pounds a year, and the noble prospect, if my health held out for another twenty years, and I stuck to my work, and

never uttered a complaint, whatever happened to me, of being allowed to retire, with a pension of fifty pounds a year, and the accumulated savings out of my princely income while in active work.'

'Is that true? Are there really people who expect others to do that for them?'

'Ay; and it's true, unluckily, not only for me, but for thousands of others, more sensible and better worth other things than I am. Well, you will be astonished to hear that the prospect had no attractions for me; and the actual reality—the work I had to do—I abominated. I neglected my work—disgracefully, they said—and went worshipping idols in the shape of theatres, people who were musical, people who were literary—any kind of people except people who belonged to counting-houses. I didn't, so they said, look after my employer's interests as if they were my own, though I was so hand-

somely paid for doing so. Poor Katty was very mournful about it; I always told her I would do better, but I never did. So one day one of my chiefs came down upon me. He characterized my conduct in terms which I dare say it merited. He said that if he had many young men like me in his counting-house he would soon be ruined; did I know that? And then he glared at me over his spectacles. He was a very thin, hungry-looking man, I recollect, with "harpy" written in every sordid line of his sordid countenance. He had on a white waistcoat, and a massive gold watch-chain, which must have cost more than would have paid my salary for two years. The whole aspect of him enraged and disgusted me. I forgot all the spectres of poverty and misery and impecuniosity in the background, and I arose in revolt.'

'What did you say to him?'



‘I told him I had no doubt that if nobody cared any more for his interests than I did, he would very soon be as poor as I was myself. I added, that if he would make it better worth my while to care for his interests, I might see my way to being more enthusiastic about them.’

‘I wonder if anyone ever said anything like that to Grandpapa Nowell. Well?’

‘Of course I had cut my throat by saying it. He almost had a fit on the spot; but by some strange mistake, it was not lawful for him to punish my remarks by instant death. All he could do was to turn me out upon the street; and he lost no time about it.’

‘Upon the street—but I thought you had a father and a sister.’

‘My father had died shortly before, much cheered in his last hours, poor fellow, by the reflection that he had got such a good place for me. He left nothing, except twenty

pounds to bury him with, and a few small debts. My sister was married. She married very early—before she was twenty. Woodfall, her husband, is a very good fellow—a bit of a vagabond himself—a clerk by day, and by way of being a kind of literary man, on the staff of a small newspaper, by night. He never had, and never will have, a penny of ready money to spare. I fear I shall shock your ears, Miss Nowell, by this coarse talk—you, who are accustomed to hear of bushels of money being disposed of, without the heap becoming any smaller.'

'Oh no ; it is very interesting—so different from their talk. Please go on.'

'Well, but we must be walking on. See how dark it is growing, and dank, and misty.'

Peril rose, and they turned their faces homewards—towards 'that house,' as she would drearily have said.

'I was literally cast upon my own re-

sources,' he went on, 'and I felt desperate. All sorts of things and expedients rushed through my head. The stage—could I go on the stage, or qualify for a minstrel in a music-hall? I was ready to try anything; but money, it seemed, was wanted for everything. You have no idea what a tyrant money is, when you haven't got any. Katty and her husband took me into their poor home, and I was a witness of their poverty. As I told you, Katty painted a little, and tried to sell her pictures; but I don't think she made ten pounds a year by them, though I thought them beautiful. I hear she is a little more successful now. Of course I could see how hard it was for them to get on alone, never to speak of having to keep a strapping young man like me. I almost repented having risen up against my employer—and yet, how glad I was to be free from him! I had many a time darkly talked

of enlisting. Katty always besought me not to do *that*—as if it were the very last resort of the miserable and destitute—which it isn't, though it is bad enough. Things came to a very bad pass with us all ; and one day, when I felt that I would rather cut my throat than give them the burden of providing for me any longer, and when I had just been refused with contumely in my application for a post bringing in sixteen shillings a week, I quietly betook myself to the nearest dépôt of a marching regiment, and enlisted. When I had done the deed, I sent word to Katty, and she came off to see me post-haste. How she did cry ! I have never forgotten it, and I never shall.'

He paused, and Peril looked at him curiously. He went on :

'Of course, at first I was rather worse off than I had been before. There's no need to enlarge upon the horrors I went through.

Horrors they were to me, because all my life I had been accustomed to refinement in the midst of our poverty ; and Katty, if she had had two chairs and a table for all her furniture, would so have arranged them as to make them look graceful—ay, if they had been short of legs—she is that kind of person. I got neither petting nor refinement in barracks, as you may imagine. I only didn't take to drinking because of the beastly holes—you will excuse the force of my expressions—which were considered good enough for such as me to drink in. As for gambling, the extent to which you may carry that on the pay of a private was not vast enough to excite my cupidity. This went on for a while, and then in the end education told, I suppose. I got promoted pretty quickly, till I came to be a sergeant. Having attained to that dizzy social and professional eminence, I got dazzled, I suppose, by the brilliance of my position,

and proceeded again to cut my throat, in a way.'

'You did not *desert*?' said Peril breathlessly, evidently seeing no other way in which he could cut his throat under the circumstances.

'No, I fell in love, and got married.'

Peril looked up quickly, and started.

'Married!—and does your wife——'

'My wife—' he began, and paused. No, he could not enter into that sad little story of the past to Peril Nowell. 'My wife was the daughter of a poor musician—vagabonds again, like ourselves, but vagabonds with hearts and brains. I had known her before I enlisted. After we had been married two years, my regiment was ordered to India. I left her and my baby-boy behind me. They were to live with my sister and her husband; and there was talk of music lessons when my wife was stronger. Ah, well! When I think of these days, and how strong we felt in our

youth and our love—all of us! I had not been away very long, when they sent me word that Nellie—was dead.'

'Oh—h!' said Peril, in the softest whisper. And he saw that there was nothing but sympathy and sadness in her face. She was not then entirely self-absorbed. He went on very quickly :

'Yes—it does not do to talk about it. I never have done so. Katty took charge of my boy for me. She has contrived to take care of him ever since. I have sent her always what money I could; but if it had been a fortune, it could never repay the love and the care that she has lavished upon my little lad. She has no children of her own; she has taken mine to her heart. My old uncle Lawford, of Wiswell Grange, who was unmarried, at this juncture did do something for me—advanced me the money to buy my discharge, and I got a clerkship in a mercan-

tile house in Bombay. Back again, you see, after all, to the old drudgery. It was a very poor thing, but I was my own master. I had friends, or at any rate acquaintance, who were very kind to me, and made me welcome. I had got a certain kind of knowledge of the world, and of the value of its prizes. I had learnt to do without them with the utmost ease, and to consider the scramble for them which is called ambition to be in every way more wearisome than dignified, and I think so now. Those who put their hearts into this scramble, get them broken; and those who don't, get every higher sensibility blunted. I don't think it is worth the price.

'By the time I had fairly mastered this accomplishment of how to do without things, a change took place. My uncle died. I received the news more than a year ago, and that I succeeded to the possession of



Wiswell Grange, and the incomes and revenues of it, which amount to the handsome sum of one hundred and fifty pounds a year, more or less—generally less, I fancy. I came home as soon as I could, and investigated my affairs. I have Humphrey—my son—to think of, or I should not be here, you may be sure. I should like to leave my permanent income quite free, to devote to him and his education. I heard of a place here, six months ago, and came to see after it, and did not get it ; and I keep staying on in the hope of better luck another time, though there has been no gleam of it as yet. If I don't soon find something, I shall be driven to retire to my damp old Grange, with Humphrey as a companion, and to live there on my revenues. Now you know all my story, Miss Nowell—you see to what an insignificant creature you have confided your troubles.'

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‘It is very, very interesting,’ she said, with a sigh. ‘I thought when you came into the drawing-room with Hugh the other night, that I could not be mistaken in the meaning of your face.’

‘Why, what meaning did you attach to it?’ he asked, remembering the steady look with which she had measured him when Hugh introduced him to her.

‘I can hardly tell. I knew nothing about you. I did not know what you were. But when I saw you I felt firmly convinced that you did not care anything about the cloth and yarn market, and that perhaps you did about other things; and you see I was right.’

‘Emphatically right,’ he said, with a laugh.

‘I hope you will not soon go away from Darkingford,’ she continued; ‘I think it is good for Hugh to have a friend like you—

better than these men who think of nothing but money ; and better than Miss Hankinson with her wild ideas. Besides, it would be so bad for him if grandpapa got to know of that.'

Lawford almost laughed again. Hugh, and always Hugh it was, who pervaded her thoughts and instigated her acts.

'There is every prospect of my remaining here at present,' he said drily.

'Here is the gate ; we are back again,' she said, in a voice which seemed to have changed, and become cold and dead. 'And,' as her tone grew animated again, 'here's Hugh, just coming up from town.'

Indeed, as they stood together at the gate, in the light of the lamp immediately opposite, Hugh came up quickly, paused when he saw them, and spoke his cousin's name in astonishment.

'You seem surprised,' said she, and it

seemed to Lawford, though he knew that he probably imagined it, that there was a softness and a caressing tone in her words. 'You did not expect to find me here with Mr. Lawford. He came to call this afternoon, and I asked him to go to Southfield with me.'

'Oh,' said Hugh, in a tone of reserve; but he shook hands with Lawford at the same time.

'He was rather surprised too,' continued Peril; 'but of course, he could only come when I asked him; and I find we have many interests in common.'

Lawford was pleased at this, though he was vexed with himself for being so, and felt as if he had made a fool of himself. He had told her things about himself, of which Nowell knew nothing, and which he had not the slightest desire to confide to him.

'Good-night, Mr. Lawford. When we

have another supper-party, we'll ask you to it.'

He wished her good-night, and they separated. Lawford went towards his lodgings. Nowell opened the gate for his cousin.





## CHAPTER V.

### AN EVENING AT HOME.

**M**Y dear Peril !' said the young man, drawing her arm through his, as they went lingeringly towards the door ; ' you were quite right when you said I was surprised. You might have "knocked me down with a feather," as nervous old ladies say. You ought not, you know—you really ought not.'

' Ought not what ?'

' To ask a man to go for a long walk with you in that way : and a man of whom we know so little as we do of Lawford.'

' You are quite mistaken. He has told me all about himself.'

Hugh laughed in a superior manner.

‘He might *tell* you anything he chose, of course. That would not make it true.’

‘Do you mean that if he had told you, you would not have believed him?’

‘It would depend on circumstances.’

‘I thought he was your *friend*,’ she said, in a tone of withering contempt. ‘Do you mean that you can doubt a person, and still call him a friend?’

‘I don’t doubt him, in your sense of the word. I don’t suspect him, but I also don’t know anything about him. As a stray acquaintance,’ opening the door with his latch-key, ‘he is very well, but to treat him in that familiar way——’

‘Oh, what nonsense!’

‘I don’t like these expeditions to Southfield,’ pursued Nowell. ‘When you go, you should send for a brougham and go properly. Debit it to me, if you like; but don’t walk,

or go in omnibuses: it is not fit for you.'

'Oh, Hugh! what utter nonsense! you don't understand. And I am not made of white sugar or rose-ice, that I should melt or break on the way.'

'It is of no use to talk in that manner. I do feel vexed,' he said.

'I think you are absurd,' replied Peril disdainfully, but with a lurking smile all the time under her curling lip. 'I hate that way of making out everything to be wrong.'

'*You* do nothing wrong,' said the man of the world of twenty-five. 'If nobody were any more wicked than you were, we should all get on very well. It is because there are bad and insolent people—in short, Peril, you will allow that I know a great deal more about the outside world than you do, and I tell you, on my honour, as I have often told



you before, that it is not fit for you to go about alone as you do.'

'You might be one of the Sisters at my old school, instead of a young man,' said she, laughing in what sounded a taunting way ; but she turned her face away at the same time, not to let him see the look of delight which came over it. At moments like these, when Hugh was so earnestly telling her what he did and what he did not like her to do, Peril felt as if she would gladly go through all her troubles twice over, for the sake of this regard. But it was not her habit to let the sweetness and humility of her answers cloy upon anyone's mental palate. They had turned into a sort of library, one of the downstairs rooms, and she now observed tartly :

'You do amaze me, Hugh. There's your great heroine and pattern, the radical Miss Hankinson ; I understood that she was in the

habit of penetrating alone to all sorts of places—slums and alleys, and goodness knows where—never to mention walking home alone from meetings with people who shall be nameless.’

‘That is different; Margaret Hankinson is perfectly different,’ he said hastily.

‘Well, she’s a good deal older, I know,’ said Peril nonchalantly. ‘That may have something to do with it. But if she goes on errands of charity to the lowest parts of the town, it does seem hard if I mayn’t carry a little jelly to a respectable place at the other side of Southfield.’

‘Now, Peril, don’t be disagreeable, but take the advice of a person who knows the world better than you do,’ said the young fellow, smiling; and Peril, though she feigned mutiny, took him at exactly his own valuation. In her eyes he was a very fine, clever man of the world; and she was daily filled

with renewed gratitude and wonder at the fact that he thought so much about her.

‘You know,’ he pursued, ‘that it is because I think much of you, and not little, that I say these things to you. And then, as I said, if we knew more about Paul Lawford. He seems a very good fellow, but——’

‘But a man always believes the worst till he knows the best.’

‘Nothing of the kind, but a practical man——’

‘Is a grand creature, according to you. Look here, Hugh; in his young days, *he*’ (she pointed towards the ceiling, above which was the drawing-room, and nodded) ‘would have been called an eminently practical man, wouldn’t he?’

‘One kind of practical man.’

‘I hope you will never develop into one. Let me tell you this: I’m the least practical

person in the world, but I took a long look at your Mr. Lawford that night you brought him here, and I trusted him. He is nothing very brilliant, and he doesn't seem ever to have been in the least successful in the pursuit of pelf. But he has had lots of troubles. He lost his young wife, and he is waiting here for a place now, in order that he may save what money he has for his little boy.'

'Lawford—his wife—a little boy!' said Hugh, in spasmodic jerks. 'He never told me——'

'No, I dare say not. He told me. Perhaps you think he invented it. Oh, fie, Hugh! I do like a person to be able to rise superior to cautiousness sometimes. If I see him again, I shall be just as polite to him as I have been to-day. *So now you know.*'

The last words were spoken with great emphasis, and with a nod of her head; and

she was marching out of the room, when Hugh caught her wrist.

‘Be as civil to him as you like, but promise me not to take him walking with you for hours together. Even if you don’t agree with me, promise me this.’

‘Now that is a kind of argument I can understand,’ said Peril. ‘I don’t agree with you in the least, Hugh. I think you are absurd, and I promise what you ask.’

‘Good girl!’ came after her like an echo, as she ran upstairs.

Hugh followed more slowly, and went to his own room, his thoughts busied with a communication that he had to make to his grandfather. After he had, to use his own expression, ‘brushed himself up a bit,’ he went into the drawing-room, where Mr. Nowell always sat now, as it was on the same level with his bedroom, and he was too great an invalid to stir about much. Hugh

found him sitting in his big chair by the fire, waiting for him ; and Mrs. Robson, grey and still, bending over her work, kept the old man company. When Hugh entered, she rose and vanished silently from the room. It was the one hour of the day when she could leave her charge, and absent herself for some little time with an easy mind ; for he was alone, and in good hands—in the hands which she wished to influence him. Peril knew better than to come near and listen to business disquisitions. It now became the young man's office to tell his relative about the business of the day—what cotton they had bought, what yarn they had sold—to quote the last prices when the market had closed that afternoon, and produce any gossip which he might have heard at the club, or on 'Change, or from men he might have met during the day.

Mr. Nowell listened to these dry details—

they would have been dry to all but one man in ten thousand—and drank them in with the same kind of rapture that a musician might experience in hearing some fine symphony. Every name that was mentioned he knew, and knew the history of its owner. He followed the account of the market with the greatest eagerness and the utmost intelligence. This cotton market, or rather the operations within it, had been the ruling passion of his life, and would remain the ruling passion in his death; and it was probable that, however long he might live, and though memory and mind should decay, this one question—money—and that article the manipulation of which represented money to him, would find him as lucid, as eager, as ready to grapple with it and as keen to understand it, as ever he had been in his brightest days. Already his memory was not what it had been; his hearing had long

been dulled, and his comprehension was slow on many points—but on this, never.

‘Well,’ he quavered, fixing his gleaming sunken eyes upon his grandson, ‘how did ya leave things?’

‘The market closed firm. There’s a big consignment of Sea Island reported at Liverpool. Hankinson thinks we had better get it.’

‘Why, of course,’ snapped the old man. ‘Didn’t he telegraph?’

‘No; he thought he’d hear what I had to say from you to-morrow.’

‘He’s a fool. You go to him after supper, and tell him to take the lot at two-and-sixpence—not a fraction more, remember. They’ll jump at it.’

‘Yes, I guess they will. Do you know that Pennsylvania and Reading are down again?’

‘Agatha read it out this morning. That’s



nothing. They are bound to go up again, and we must just hold on.'

'There's another thing,' pursued Hugh, eyeing him askance, with a half smile of anticipation on his face. 'I only heard it just before I came up. It won't be in the papers till to-morrow.'

'Ay, what's that?' asked his elder, in the tone of one who is accustomed to hear the exaggerated statements of youth, and to receive them with serene indifference. He did not trouble himself to raise his head, but sat with his chin a little sunk upon his chest, his shoulders high, his eyes dull and unexpectant—a feeble old man one would have said, very near his end, and past caring for the troubles and turmoils of business, or the poor joys and pains of gains and losses.

'Why,' said Hugh slowly, 'Hutchinsons of Broadfield are down at last.'

'What!' he almost screamed, and the list-

less and sunken figure sprang erect as if electrified. He started up with gleaming eyes, looking like some old Lear, so far as his white hairs and reverend aspect went, and with as wild a light in his eyes ; but from a cause as far removed from the cause of Lear's woe, as the farthest east is from the ultimate west.

‘Hutchinsons down—Martin Hutchinson!’ which name, by the way, he pronounced ‘Utcheson. ‘Say that again, lad—say it again!’ he shrieked in a quavering voice. ‘‘Utchesons down ; did I hear thee right?’

‘Quite right,’ said Hugh coldly, revolted, not amused, as he had expected to be. ‘The news came about half-past four, and it spread like wildfire, of course. They are gone for three quarters of a million.’

‘Ah—ugh, ugh!’ he cackled. ‘What news, lad! What news! I began to think I should never see the day. Ha, ha! Hech!

oh, ho! 'Utchesons are gone at last. Thank God for that! 'Ay, ay! pride will have a fall—a fall. Pride will have a fall. What's that the Scripture says—"the mighty—how are the mighty fallen!" I can't remember. But 'Utchesons were proud, and they have fallen.'

Hugh felt himself thrill uneasily, with the conviction that if pride were to have a fall, surely James Nowell's day of humiliation must be nigh at hand. And he felt as if he, Hugh Nowell, though he loathed the whole thing so deeply, must be in some way included in this fall, when it came. The sons had to suffer for the sins of the fathers. This horrible triumphing in the fall of people whose sin against him was that in the days of his first uprising he had been their servant, and that in later years they had steadily refused to acknowledge him as their social equal, was so horrible to Hugh, that

he felt it impious, and discovered something weird and fearful, as indeed there was, in the aspect of the old man, as he chuckled and giggled, and rubbed his hands together, and laughed in a senile manner, and carried on a sort of low, rejoicing whinnying to himself over the fate of the unfortunate Hutchinsons.

They had committed several unforgivable sins against him. They had been the firm in whose office he had begun his career as 'boy' to run errands, and be at everyone's beck and call. They had been a great and powerful firm then, and as years had gone on, and he had gone up, they had come down; they had always been proud people, socially as well as commercially. In the days of their failing fortunes, they had (though they had helped him materially when he had first started his little independent business, the germ of his present vast factories) remembered his and their relative positions

in days gone by, and had consistently refused to admit him to their own level socially. Even when he was rolling in wealth, and the first adverse rumours were gaining currency about their house, Mrs. Hutchinson had refused to have Mr. Nowell presented to her at a public entertainment. He had found the upper-class doors of Darkingford closed against him more rigorously than they might have been in a place where he was unknown. Mrs. Hutchinson had not forgotten that he had been her husband's office-boy, and would rather have died than see him sit down in her drawing-room. He had not forgotten it either, and he rejoiced now, coarsely, hideously, and grossly.

'Stop a bit,' he said suddenly, pausing in the midst of his chuckles. 'Are we in for anything with them? I forget.'

'Eight thousand,' said Hugh reluctantly ;

and went on more quickly, 'But everyone says there will be an arrangement. They will liquidate, and then they'll be able to pull through. Everyone is sorry about it.'

'There will be no arrangement with *this* creditor,' he screamed, in fierce excitement ; 'no arrangement with me. I'll have my money ; every penny of it I'll have : and if they don't pay it down, I'll take proceedings against them. Eight thousand—ay, ay ! ay, ay ! I'll have it. I'll make him bite the dust, and his mincing madam of a wife, too. Wait awhile ! Hech ! hech !'

'But I don't see how in common decency we can grind it out of him, when everybody else arranges. It would be simply monstrous.'

'Ya young greenhorn !' his elder chid him vehemently. 'Howd your silly tongue ! Much you know about it.' And then, as if he rejoiced, and congratulated himself on

his great good fortune, he went on, mumbling and chuckling, and what Hugh and Peril would have called, in Lancashire idiom, 'chunnering' in low tones over the delightful news of Hutchinsons' collapse. Poor Hugh, who felt less like a man of the world now than when admonishing his handsome cousin on the impropriety of inviting casual acquaintances to take walks with her, sat silent. His cheerful spirit was overclouded. Hankinson, Whittaker, Lloyd, everybody had said that the Hutchinsons were very unfortunate; that they were honourable people, and that if treated with an even moderate degree of forbearance, it was probable that they would recover themselves, and that all claims would be eventually paid. Every decent man hoped it. Hugh, who was open-handed, would have liked to be amongst the foremost to waive their claims for an indefinite time; but this dreadful old man, who looked just

now more like an incarnate fiend, chuckling to himself over some good person's destruction, would, as he knew, rather die, rather see the whole mercantile community of Darkingford rise up in a body, and point the finger and cry shame upon him, than abate one jot of his delicious, much-longed-for revenge.

Oh, when he was the master, thought Hugh, then should a different régime begin, and 'Nowells' earn as proud a name for their princely generosity, as they now had for its opposite. They were not merchant princes ; no one ever saw their name on any list of committee or subscriptions to promote any social, political, or charitable object. They grabbed their pelf with greedy hands, and when they had clutched it, they held it fast. How long would the present wretched condition of things go on ? What was the good of blinking the fact that this awful old man was



worse than a superfluity, a nuisance ? His eager young spirit stretched forward, and saw such beautiful vistas in the future, when he should have this money, and prove to the world that he knew how to use it graciously and competently. The present was so long, so hard, and so dry.

Peril and Mrs. Robson came in, one after the other, and both beheld with amazement Mr. Nowell's state of excitement, and his grotesque chucklings and rubbings of the hands.

They looked towards Hugh for information, and both understood perfectly, when he simply said, almost in his ordinary voice, for the old man was lost in his thoughts :

‘Hutchinsons have come down, and he's offering a burnt sacrifice in his soul.’

‘To his master the devil,’ remarked Peril, beneath her breath. They had not lived with him for eighteen, seventeen, and four

years respectively, and remained unacquainted with the name of Hutchinson.

Then ensued three-quarters of an hour of unmitigated dreariness. When Mr. Nowell had his family around him thus, he exacted from them a due meed of respectful attention. No reading or writing, or any occupation which could abstract them from the consciousness of his presence, was permitted. Mrs. Robson and Peril might work ; Hugh must sit still near his chair, and tell him things, the more ill-natured the better.

Seen from the outside, and judging from appearances, no one would have been justified in calling Mr. Nowell a wicked old man. Conventional opinion does not discern wickedness in a life of unblemished respectability ; in a large fortune, gained chiefly by one's own exertions ; in diligent attendance of a man at his place of worship, so long as bodily infirmity did not prevent him from

going to it, and in apparently liberal contributions to the funds connected with his religious body ; in a household whose affairs were regulated by clock-work, and whose routine included family prayers every evening without exception. Conventional opinion sees in all this the embodiment of its own sentiments, the perfect obedience to its own laws ; it can but smile and approve, and say, What a fine old man old James Nowell is ! Let conventional opinion inquire a little further—go back a little into its dear old James Nowell's history, and it will become cognizant of various facts, which it will of course judge from its own point of view.

He had been born, bred, and begun to work at a time favourable to the development of such cleverness as he possessed. It was not, as must have been seen, the cleverness of a high intellect, or of a broad and expansive, or even humane mind ; it was the

cleverness which consists in an unlimited capacity for heaping up gain. Perfectly ignorant of the world and of any kind of society outside the pale of the Darkingford Royal Exchange and the congregation that, along with himself, 'sat under' the minister of Ebenezer Chapel—a clique to whom money first, and cotton, with respectability following next, were the chief and supreme objects of this life—he never wished or thought of moving from their groove, to fit into which he would, indeed, seem to have been created. At thirty he was already doing well in a business point of view, and had then taken to wife the good-looking, high-natured daughter of a dissenting minister of the city. Her name was Dorothy Whittaker, and the reason which could have induced her to marry him must remain one of those inscrutable mysteries, of which there are such numberless examples every day thrust under one's notice. 'Why

did that woman marry that man?' is the question which occurs to one's mind only less often than the other question : ' What induced that man to marry that woman ?'

Perhaps she had imagined that his handsome face, for he was handsome in his youth, concealed a spirit equally agreeable ; perhaps she believed that under his taciturnity and gravity lay hidden a fiery, loving nature : it is one of the traps into which women oftenest fall, and the fact of his wishing to marry her would naturally encourage so pleasing an illusion. If that were the case, a few years of married life must have undeceived her, and very plainly discovered to her that there was no rough outside crust, with love, and passion, and romance beneath ; it was all hewn out of the same piece, and that piece was granite. She never let him know, if she did undergo this disillusion.

As years rolled on, and they went to

the more ambitious house in Great North Street, she wore her silks and satins, and the massive, ungainly jewellery with which he presented her from time to time (never without an eye to its soundness as an investment), with a certain comely dignity ; but her face was never seen to beam with happiness—perhaps in a member of such a serious congregation that might have looked out of place—and she gradually grew more fond of books and solitude, and less and less disposed to seek any outside amusements or society. She bore him two sons, and down in her heart she craved, with what a craving only she knew, for a daughter. She thought how sweet such a companion would be—one who could never be taken away from her and put into a counting-house, and hardened just at the most susceptible years into a money-making machine—one to whom she might speak out some of her shut-up thoughts.

But the daughter never came ; she never needed to choose amongst the many pretty, fanciful names of which she had made a list, as being sweet names to call a little girl. 'Sister,' 'daughter,' were two blessed words whose spell never was exercised in the dreary house at Great North Street. The sons, as has been said, did not grow up after their father's heart. Most happily for Mrs. Nowell, she died of a fever before the time of wrangling came between father and sons ; she was spared the agony of seeing verified what she had long been secretly conscious of, that in her husband's life and actions, money, gain, business, had a stronger influence by far than she had.

The wrangling did come—after she was gone. It was fierce and miserable ; there were battles and disputes, the father wishing to chain the sons to the counting-house, and, oblivious of the fact that he had given them

a liberal education, repeating with asinine persistency that what had been good enough for him ought to be good enough for them too. They had more of their mother than of him in them—her sensitiveness, and some of her shrinking delicacy ; they had not the rough, coarse strength to combat him with his own weapons ; he practically won the battle, and destroyed them in the process. And then, as the conqueror, he ‘proclaimed peace where he had made a solitude.’

When he had got rid of them, and before they died, he made them each an allowance of a hundred and fifty pounds a year, with the promise of a free pardon to either or both of them who should come and acknowledge himself to have been wrong, and submit to his father’s will in the matter of entering the counting-house. He then summoned Mrs. Robson, a poor relation, who had recently become a widow, to keep his house for him ;



and he went on his grim sordid way, clawing up money, cutting down expenses, and firmly convinced that in offering his sons a respectable business, and rigorously refusing to help them into professions which he hated, he had done his whole duty by them. Hugh's father had been the first to marry ; and he supported himself and his young wife for some little time by a slender kind of literary work. They both died ; and then the grandfather came forward, fetched the boy home to him, and took care, having been warned, as he would have said, by the example of his sons, that Hugh should not be spoiled for a business man by any nonsense of 'college education and kickshaws.'

The advent of the little boy had made sunshine in one life at least—in that of Mrs. Robson. Starved for so long of any object on which to lavish her affections, reduced by dire poverty to passive obedience to the

dictates of her employer (for he always let her understand that he viewed their relation strictly in a commercial light), the poor woman hailed the child as a sort of saviour, and loved him passionately and with a dog-like fidelity. Everything that he did had an interest for her. His lessons, his masters, his fights with his schoolfellows, his holidays and his punishments, were as much to her as the most thrilling of dramas. This love awoke an almost miraculous tact and intelligence in an otherwise mediocre mind and character. She got to know exactly what to say and do and suggest to the grandfather which should be of most service for Hugh and his interests. She looked forward with ardour to the time when the old man should be dead, and her darling in possession of the good things for which they had waited so long.

Then Peril appeared on the scene—a girl of fifteen, looking four years older, and beauti-

ful as the day—just after Nowell's twenty-first birthday. Mrs. Robson's fears instantly took fire. Of course Hugh would fall in love with the girl, and so arouse the displeasure of his grandfather, who abhorred marriages of consanguinity. Or, and this was after all the most alarming contingency, Mr. Nowell himself might succumb to the spell of Peril's miraculous and unusual beauty. He was an old man, and all old men were fools where a young woman, beautiful or ugly, was in question. He would dote upon her, and favour her to the detriment of Hugh's interests. In either case, she hated the interloper, because she had a small nature, which long years of oppression had made also hard; and she grudged Peril every word of civility from the lips of either the old man or the young one, and spent many an hour of the night in scheming how to get her sent away, either to school or anywhere else, so that she and her

matchless face and beautiful form got removed from the sight of the two men.

Peril was not sent away, and the crisis got somehow tided over ; but not before the girl had discovered the woman's feelings towards her, and had made haste to return them with interest. The hatred, though it smouldered, was still there ; the jealousy, though concealed, was as strong as ever. Hugh had not come through the ordeal unscathed. For about a month he had had eyes and ears for no one but his cousin ; she was like no one—like nothing that he had ever seen before. He was dazzled, bewildered, stunned by her. And then, perhaps, the very wildness and exaggeration of his sentiment wrought its own cure, or some sudden fury or passion of Peril's had opened his eyes in an unguarded moment. He had never ceased to be her friend ; he was proud of her great beauty ; was as much of a martinet about her in-

comings and outgoings as brothers generally are, and treated her with a frank openness of affection which might have shown her the true nature of his attachment to her. But she did not want to know it. It gleamed upon her at times, taking her unawares, as it were, and she always thrust it away from her, and secretly told herself that so long as she knew of no rival she was safe. And she had met with none yet. This Margaret Hankinson, of whom he spoke with such enthusiasm, was older by two years than himself, and, as it seemed to Peril, plain. She felt her beneath her notice as a rival, actual or possible ; and on this particular evening she was in a much sweeter mood than usual. Her walk and talk with Lawford, which Hugh had so condemned, had done her good. As they sat in almost unbroken silence, wearing out this ghastly three quarters of an hour before supper, she thought once or

twice of her companion that afternoon, and wondered what there had been about him to make her open out her mind to him as she had done. He did not seem to be a particularly strong character ; she glanced at Hugh, with his resolute lip and straight eyebrows, his look of gallant youthful determination—no, Mr. Lawford was but a languid effeminate creature compared with this strong young cousin of hers, who could scarcely wait till his time came for springing into the arena, and, as it were, taking the whole amphitheatre by storm. *When* the time came, thought Peril, when he bounded forward, scattering his wealth in royal style, and making up for the time lost in drudgery, what a triumph it would be ! How the women would admire and applaud, and how the men would envy ! And what would she be doing in the meantime ? Well, she had a happy confidence that she would not be play-

ing an obscure part. Perhaps they might make their *début* hand in hand, and then men might join in the chorus of applause, and women turn pale with envy.

Supper was presently announced, and a tray brought up containing Mr. Nowell's evening meal. The three others went downstairs, and exchanged the first comments upon the manner in which the news of the Hutchinson episode had been received.

'It's no good,' said Hugh; 'we shall have to circumvent him in some way. We shall have the whole town hooting at us if we press for our money when the others don't.'

'Pay him out of his own money, and pretend it is Mr. Hutchinson's, and that he has been very much distressed to raise it,' said Peril vindictively. 'That would be a lovely revenge, Hugh.'

He laughed, and said they must certainly do something. When they went out of the

dining-room, Hugh, instead of going upstairs again, took his hat from its peg.

‘Where are you going?’ asked Peril suspiciously.

‘I have to go to Hankinson’s about some business. Perhaps I may go on to Lawford’s.’

‘Indeed!’ said she, going into the vestibule and capturing his hat, while he put on his coat; ‘suppose I don’t let you have this?’

Mrs. Robson, on her way upstairs, cast an uneasy glance behind her.

‘Suppose I take it from you?’ he rejoined.

‘Indeed! I should like to see you; if I ran upstairs, it would be the hare and the tortoise, and no mistake.’

She had put his hat on her head, and turning, was making with the speed of lightning for a run upstairs, but found herself checkmated. While she had been circling about, insulting him with comparisons about



the hare and the tortoise, he had turned the key in the vestibule door, and now stood looking at her with a malicious smile, and twirling the key round in his thumb and finger.

‘You wretch!’ exclaimed Peril; ‘that is how you always cheat me. Underhand work, I call it.’

‘That is how I keep possession of my hats, gloves, and comforters. When a man is attacked, he must defend himself. Most hats suit you, Peril, but not a hard round billycock like that. Suppose you drop it.’

‘If it doesn’t suit me, fancy what an object you must look in it!’ said Peril. ‘You haven’t fastened the street door, so you can catch me if you can.’

She made a triumphant dart towards it, but he was beforehand with her, and put his back against it, confronting her smiling.

‘If it comes to a trial of strength,’ he

observed, 'I know who will win. Give me my hat, Peril, or I shall be finding Hankinson out, and not be able to deliver my message about two-and-sixpence, and not a fraction more.'

'The strong-minded Margaret will deliver it accurately enough,' said Peril flippantly. 'I should think she could remember all such things as that, and understand them.'

'Well, I should hope so. I should think even you might do that.'

'Not I. Pray what is two-and-sixpence? Is it a quart, or a peck, or a bushel? And is it for potatoes, or waste-paper, or——'

'It's cotton, by the pound. Best Sea Island. Give me my hat;' and he took it off her head.

'I hate Hankinson, and I hate Lawford, and all the rest of them.'

'I wish you had begun to hate Lawford a

little earlier in the day, then. There would have been some meaning in it if you had. As for poor Hankinson——'

'It isn't him ; it is because it leaves me alone with these two people. One of these evenings, when you come in you will find that my brain has given way, and that I have begun to shout and sing. Then you'll have to put me into a cab, and carry me off to a madhouse.'

'Well, I know it is gruesome in the extreme. What can I do?'

'You can get away from it, and go and talk to Miss Hankinson,' she said tartly.

'Nothing of the kind,' was the hasty reply. 'He told me to go and tell Hankinson about this cotton. I wcn't go to Lawford's. I will come back soon.'

'Do, and I won't make faces at you while you are reading prayers. How your voice trembled last night!'

With a low laugh of malignant enjoyment, she opened the vestibule door, and ran upstairs, leaving him to go and see Mr.—or Miss—Hankinson.

Going upstairs, Peril found that Mr. Nowell was being led off to bed. He had got so excited over Hugh's news about the Hutchinson failure that he had suddenly collapsed, and was now tottering away, supported by his man Smith. Peril saw how very old and broken and feeble he looked, and she realized suddenly that they would not now have very long to wait. She instantly began to build upon the future.

'I feel so happy to-night—so much more light-hearted,' she thought. 'I feel as if things would come right after all. If I can only have a little patience, and *seem* mild and gentle, perhaps it will all come right. And if it did—in that way—I should never need to seem any more; I should be good, because

I should feel good. To-night, in the vestibule, I nearly got into a passion, just for a moment, and then, instead of promising to come home, Hugh would have looked at me as he does—and nearly freezes me. He does not know that it is not I, but something in me—a devil—that I cannot help it, and that many a time, when it was too late, I have cried all night—so he looks at me in that way. But now, there is something worth being patient for, and I will—I will not once give way.'





## CHAPTER VI.

PAUL LAWFORD TO MRS. WOODFALL.

**Y**OU may rejoice or not, Katty, when you hear that fate, or something, seems to bind my fortunes up with those of the Nowell clan. One of their staff at the office has had the great good sense to take himself off to Canada, to join a brother out there; and I have got his place. It isn't much of a thing, but with it, and fifty pounds out of my income, I can live very well, and the other hundred a year you will keep on Humphrey's account and your own. My post may improve, of course; I may get promoted, and

my salary too. You may be sure I shall let you know when such is the case. Now that I have got it, I may tell you that the feeling of having work of any kind is like being in heaven; a trite comparison—only that nothing is trite that you realize very strongly. That is the first and foremost piece of news. The next is, that I have, by an accident, become acquainted with further particulars of the drama going on at 61, Great North Street. It waxes more amusing, because the plot is thickening. The other morning I was at the office, and Nowell was talking to me. He was very full of a Society to which he belongs, and which has for its object the nationalization of the land—a sort of thing of which I dare say you have heard before—I have, often. They were going to have a big meeting that night. He was going, of course. He was a member of it, and would be on the platform. Would not I go too? Had I formed any convictions

on the subject? I never can help teasing him a bit when he asks me questions like that, as if the fate of the world depended upon my answer; so I said, not at all truly, "None, absolutely none, except that if I had land—much or little—I would stick to it to the last gasp." And I suggested, while he was hunting in his desk for a pamphlet to put me right on the subject, that I didn't think it would do him any good with his grandfather, if the latter knew that he belonged to a Society like this.

'He burst out laughing, and rubbed his hands.

"That's the beauty of it," he said. "If he knew, he'd be fit to cut me off with a shilling."

"Well, isn't it madness?" I expostulated. "The thing will all be reported, and if you are on the platform, your name will be with the others."



““Ay, but then he can't read the papers. Mrs. Robson reads to him every morning, just what she thinks good for him to hear. She won't read that, you may be sure.”

‘He laughed confidently; but I remembered what Peril had said, and it seemed to me that they were playing with fire, and might get their fingers burnt some day, perhaps through the revelations of some unconscious Mrs. Magson, or similar person. He had again pressed me to go, and I was on the point of refusing, when Hankinson, the manager, came in.

““Oh, Mr. Hugh, I didn't know that you were here.”

‘I had always noticed how vastly civil he was to “Mr. Hugh,” and had concluded that it was policy—with an eye to the future. So it is, partly; but there is another reason as well, and a very natural one.

““I'll be ready in a moment,” says Hugh.

“I’ve been telling Mr. Lawford, whose politics are in an unsatisfactory condition, that he had better go with us to the land meeting to-night.”

“Perhaps Mr. Lawford’s politics are like my own—not quite so reckless as yours,” said Hankinson. He has rather a soapy smile, but there is no doubt he is a first-rate man of business. He turned to me, and added :

“I should be delighted to have a supporter to-night. I am going to take care of my daughter and Miss Nowell”—I pricked up my ears—“as Mr. Hugh is going on the platform ; and however independent they may be, I don’t think it fit for them to be alone. Will you join us at our evening meal, and go with us, Mr. Lawford ?”

‘I suppose this wonderful civility is chiefly due to the fact that I am a friend of the heir apparent. I was pleased to have the chance of seeing Peril again, and I felt some curiosity

concerning Miss Hankinson, about whom I have heard from different people at different times. I professed myself delighted to accept the invitation. Nowell said they would call for me on their way to Mr. Hankinson's, and so we parted.

‘I was quite ready at the appointed time, and I suppose you will burst out laughing when I further reveal, that on the chance, so remote that you might almost call it non-existent, of Miss Nowell's coming in, and being for two minutes within my dwelling, I spent a full quarter of an hour in walking up and down that wretched little den, altering the furniture, and, as I intended, making it put its best side foremost. Alas, Katty! vagabond though I am, I am not yet up to the dodges of professional lodging-house keepers. All my labour was for nought. I had better have let the things alone, as I found when it was too late. I discovered

that the existing arrangement, which I had never cared to disturb before, hideous though I had often thought it, was intended to make the best of a bad business, and to conceal the ravening and wickedness in the background. Rickety legs there were in abundance ; backs of sofas all one horrible rag ; tables with broad, deep flaps, carefully placed over rents in the carpet, making as it were a cave to conceal the iniquity, and so forth. The last state of that place was worse than the first ; and when my operations were completed, they presented every appearance of the most brutal ravages.

‘Of course there was no danger of their coming in. I must have been mad to dream of such a thing. They called at the door, and I rushed out, leaving my landlady to make what she would or could of the débris I had left behind me. We all three walked to Hankinson’s. He does not

live far away, in a street called Queen Street ; and he must have a very good berth at Mr. Nowell's, for his house is nearly as large as his master's, and in a very much pleasanter situation.

‘ Miss Hankinson—Margaret is her name, and it seems to me to suit her, but I don't know why—is a girl, or young woman, with a plain face, a good figure, splendid eyes, and very fine and sympathetic manners. Her voice is delightful ; and I could imagine that what I have heard of her is true—that she has been heard to say, no such thing as an “odious” person exists for her. I don't know whether that is strength or weakness ; I should imagine it might be either, according to circumstances, but I can quite believe that it is her nature. She makes a very agreeable hostess, self-forgotten and unaffected ; we had a very pleasant meal, and I found my usual amusement in watching the others. What a

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blessing it is, when, being incapacitated one's self, either by having already lived one's life, or by poverty and insignificance, or by all combined, as in my case, from even thinking of taking any active part one's self, one can derive amusement at any rate, if not excitement, from the spectacle of one's neighbours, and their pushings and strugglings, their writhings and gaspings. . One sees them there, desperately in earnest ; this one holding both his sides with laughter, that one calling upon the heavens to fall and crush her, because of her great misery ; eyes gleaming, lips parted, faces all aglow with battle, or hope, or eagerness—or else pale with despair, or convulsed with passion ; and one wonders what it is all about. It is easy enough to know, I suppose. They are all fighting for something that is to make them happy, or else they are agonized by the loss of it ; and in ninety-nine cases out of a

hundred, it is not anything which is necessary to existence, or probably even to comfort ; but they have set their hearts upon it, and imagined it into something indispensable ; and when one sees the results, one feels glad one has shaken one's self free of it all, and learnt how very easy it is to do without all these things.'

[Mrs. Woodfall, *loquitur*: ' Poor dear Paul ! He says that to cheer me up, and make me think that he is rather enjoying himself than otherwise. Does he think I don't know that he knows as well as I do, that it is just the being in or out of that stream which makes the difference between living and existing ? And does he suppose I can't see that he is thinking a great deal too much about this uncanny girl, whom I don't half like ? unless, indeed, she were to be inspired to fall in love with Paul, and give over thinking of this stupid cousin, who

seems to me to be a very conceited young man.']

‘But I won’t preach. I know you don’t like it. I was going to tell you about things. I like Miss Hankinson very much, and Hugh thinks he is in love with her. Not a very unusual phase in a young man’s history, is it, for him to imagine himself in love with a charming and accomplished woman, older than himself? He is a good, ingenuous, *naïf* creature. He has such a frank face, it does me good to look at him. And he is so proud of being, as he thinks, in love with such a superior woman, that he cannot help letting everyone see his state of feeling. She seems to me to behave very well about it, and very sensibly. She has the upper hand of her own feelings, at any rate, which is what might naturally be expected.

‘I wondered how Peril would take it, and



found that, whether from pride, or because she is really a person who uses exaggerated language, and gives you the idea that she thinks a great deal more of people than is really the case, she behaved as if it were the most natural thing in the world. She was a good deal more animated than usual, with almost a flush on her cheeks, and looking perfectly marvellous for beauty. It came into my head that she means to fight a battle with Miss Hankinson for the great prize, Hugh Nowell. Of course she will win, because Miss Hankinson, unless I am much mistaken, would withdraw from the combat as soon as it became a question of seriously combating.

‘ Nearly all the time we were at the table there was a great deal of talk about a failure there has been of some Hutchinsons—old-established people here. It will not enlighten you much when I tell you that it is

the town's talk. Old Nowell is their creditor to the tune of between eight and ten thousand pounds; and it seems he means to screw it out of them, every penny, while all the other creditors are ready and wishful to come to an arrangement. If he insists, and presses his claim, it will upset everything; because it would be most unjust to the other creditors, don't you see, for one of them, and him the richest of the lot, to get twenty shillings in the pound, while others had to put up with fifteen, or less. Instead of the Hutchinsons being able to liquidate by arrangement, they would have to be made bankrupts, which is what old Nowell is aiming at, as they are much hated by him, for the very human and natural reason that they treated him well when he was their servant, but wouldn't admit him to their drawing-room in later life—so far as I can make out. Hugh and Hankinson have,

after much deliberation, decided to take the matter into their own hands, and practise a pious fraud—that, namely, of paying old Nowell his debt out of his own money, and making him believe, *pro tem.*, that it has been extracted with much difficulty from the Hutchinsons, with great detriment to their convenience. It was Peril who originally suggested this proceeding, in a joke, and they are carrying it out in earnest, as it is considered almost certain that these Hutchinsons will eventually pay up honourably and fully. Little else was talked about at tea. They laughed very much at the idea of circumventing the old gentleman so cleverly, and I noticed that Peril seemed very much interested, and took far more share in the conversation than she usually does. After tea, when we were waiting for the cab that was to take us to the meeting, she said to me that she was enjoying this, because she

knew it would almost kill him with rage if ever he came to hear of it.

“Well,” said I, “don’t you feel a little nervous, and afraid that he might get to hear of it?”

“How you do croak! You said something like that once before; and, as I told you then, he cannot get to know anything of the kind, unless one were deliberately to tell him of it, and I suppose that is just the one point on which Mrs. Robson and I are agreed—rather to have our tongues cut out than speak a syllable to betray Hugh.”

‘Hugh, at that moment, was absorbed in conversation with Miss Hankinson, over some pamphlets that they seemed to be examining. Peril’s eye fell upon them, and a look came over her face—not a pleasant look. I believe she was going to say something to me, but the cab came, and we set off.

‘We certainly never expected any excite-

ment at the meeting; indeed, I was going simply because it interested me to be with the other people who were of the party. We had area tickets, but the places were not numbered. We got down early, therefore, to get good seats, and arrived before the time advertised for the doors to be open. Hugh, who spoke with authority, said he thought we could get in through the committee-room. I could hardly help smiling at the lad, and his earnestness and gravity. He thought they were going to deal a blow to-night at the existing system of land-tenure, which would make it reel and stagger, if it did not fell it altogether—a blow from which it would never really recover. Full of the joy of official authority—for he is on the Darkingford Branch Committee of the Society, and was likewise a steward, or something—he led us into the committee-room, and through it into the hall. We

started back in astonishment. It was packed—area, back of the hall, galleries, every corner—with an audience which must have been there long enough. How they got there seemed to be a mystery. The big doors were not open, and there was none of the bustle usual at such times of waiting. Some of the men seated on the front benches were grim-looking fellows enough, knowing, I should say, precious little about land-tenure, right or wrong, and caring even less; but ready for a row, though they looked quiet enough then. We stood, gazing feebly at the overflowing benches, and looking foolish enough, I dare say.

““Holloa!” said Hugh to a brother official who came up, ‘what’s the meaning of this? How did they get here?’”

““They must have come in by one of the side-doors; and the meaning is, unless we take care—a row.””

‘ “ Why should there be a row ? ”

‘ “ You’ll see. We have sent word to the police, but of course we don’t want to look as if we were afraid, or suspected anything. Cadman, who knows this sort of thing well, tells me there are lots of Irish here—Land-leaguers probably—who will behave decently enough if we let them alone ; but he thinks there are a lot of Church of England Tory roughs ; and history knows what they are—and so do we.”

‘ Hugh nodded, but his eyes glittered with excitement, and I felt a little curiosity myself.

‘ “ Peril, and Miss Hankinson, you will go home, of course. If there is going to be a disturbance, you are best away,” said Master Hugh, who is an ardent advocate for women’s rights.

‘ He spoke with all the authority of a lord of creation.

“Go home, indeed!” said Peril. “If there’s going to be a row, Hugh, I shall stop and see it. I never heard of such a cool proposal. You’ll stay, won’t you, Miss Hankinson?”

“I am quite sure Miss Hankinson will see that it is best to go home,” he said, resentfully.

“Miss Hankinson sees that if we get a comfortable place upstairs in the boxes, it will be much the best to stay and see it out. I quite agree with Miss Nowell.”

‘Foiled in his endeavour to enforce them to betray feminine timidity, and as Mr. Hankinson and I loudly applauded their resolution, Hugh had nothing for it but to comply. He piloted us to one of the boxes. They are, you must know, only five in number, and are, as it were, hung up in the air, near the roof, above the gallery, facing the platform—quite out of reach of disturbance, and



commanding an excellent view of the hall and everything in it.

‘I am past experiencing any feeling save one of amusement at such things, or I should say it was a very remarkable sight that we saw—this immense hall, which is oftenest used for peaceful entertainments, such as concerts, bazaars, and amateur theatricals, filled, till it could hold no more, with an audience composed almost entirely of men, and those men mostly rough, black, and unkempt-looking. All the people with any pretensions to position or gentility were on the platform—a good many women amongst them—and by-and-by the proceedings began.

‘From the very first it was evident that there was an unruly, contradictory spirit abroad. There were exponents of theories both for and against the nationalization of land on the platform. We saw Hugh, looking very happy and expectant, in the second

row. In the chair they had got—whether as an example of all virtue, or as a living warning against the folly of self-sacrifice, I know not—but they had captured and placed in the chair a youngish man, who is so enraptured with the views they hold, that he has, in order to carry them out practically, presented his patrimonial acres to the Society, who are manipulating them according to their convictions of how land should be held; and this worthy gentleman is under the firm impression that in a few years—say in the course of this generation or the next—so many great landholders will have followed his example that Government will be forced to see which way things are tending, and will “act accordingly.” One does not know whether to be most amused or most dejected by the discovery of such conduct. He may be pleased and satisfied with what he has done, but he is a melancholy looking object.

In his opening address, he looked round with a ghastly smile upon the assembled multitude, and in a hollow voice said, he wished to review the past, and give his views upon the probable future. Some persons had told them to be courageous, and to hope ; for his part, he considered that hope was a vain feeling. (A voice from the background : "Thou looks as if thou did, lad ! cheer up a bit !") After he had reduced us to the last stage of melancholy foreboding by his lugubrious tones and still more lugubrious sentiments, and had given us to understand that though he hoped nothing, still he meant to go on working just as if he did, he called upon another man to speak, and sat down.

'I'm not going to bore you with an account of all the speeches. The first man told us how he was going to take the land and give it to the people who had a right to it. He worked us up into a state of some

excitement by repeating the well-known stories of Irish rack-renting and wholesale evictions, and the ghastly tales of the Sutherland and other Scotch clearings. Is it not wonderful how we know these things, and go on hearing about them and reading about them, and work ourselves up into "states" about them at meetings, and never *do* anything? What a vast, endless leavening is required, before that huge mass, the British public, begins to work! While he spoke there was a good deal of interruption, many cat-calls, and much whistling; but he "got through," as the Yankees would say.

'Then the next man spoke against the nationalization of land, and in favour of the present system of tenure. I can't imagine why they let him. It is a way some of these ultra-reformers have, of thinking that every man has a right to be heard—that all sides of a question should be studied, and that if

you treat your opponents with courtesy, and listen carefully to what they have to say, you may get a few useful hints from them. A committee of simple Liberals or Tories would have had better sense, and would have squashed him at once. It would have been better, in fact, if he had been squashed; for he roused up the Land-leaguers, if Land-leaguers they were. I don't say that they were; it was what I was told. When they heard that the present state of things bore distinct evidence of its divine origin, and perfect fitness for the wants of the people at large, they got restive, and fidgeted about a good deal. From that moment the fun began to grow faster. We could see exactly where the disturbance came from—a knot or body of a hundred or so, I should say, almost immediately below us in the hall. They flung various jeers at this man, and the other party upheld him with vigorous

language. The galleries began to be troubled, and to move about restlessly. But this man—he was a parson of some sort—got his speech finished. He said his say, and sat down; and then our hilarious chairman rose again, and expressed a hope that the same courtesy would be extended to Mr. Lorrimer as had been allowed to the last speaker. A little more, I hoped; but we were to prove the truth of the chairman's words, that hope was a vain feeling—at any rate, when it expects decent behaviour from an irate and unruly mob.

‘The chairman sat down. Mr. Lorrimer rose up—an aristocrat born, a democrat by force of conviction; a gentleman, mind you, in the old severe sense of the word—what the Jingo mob below would have called a “swell.” He began in accents which instantly proclaimed the man of breeding.

“Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen.’

At least, I suppose he began in that way. We heard as far as "Mr. Chair——" and not another syllable ; for almost simultaneously with his getting on his legs there arose a din compared with which I should fancy pandemonium would seem mild and quiet. Hollow groaning, as loud as thunder, and far more horrid than the most tremendous clap I ever heard ; for thunder does not express evil passions—it is grand : this was hideous. A perfect tempest of yells and hisses accompanied it, and utterly drowned the applause of those who wished to welcome Mr. Lorrimer. They did their best : they madly waved hats and handkerchiefs, they shouted and stamped and cheered—in vain. Nothing could silence that awful groaning ; which was the most horrible thing I ever heard out of a nightmare. It was a row with a vengeance, though it had not got to a head yet ; the opposing parties were trying their respective strengths. I

have heard—but it is only hearsay, and I don't vouch for the truth of it—that the public interest in favour of the question they were going to discuss was not enough to bring together a sufficient audience in support of it to fill the hall, and an immense body of roughs, raving for war, king, and constitution, as the lowest deep of the mob always does, had organized a “spree” for themselves, and the complete wreck of the meeting. There were enough who were in favour of the meeting to make a sturdy resistance; but the roughs had it, and it was a spectacle for gods and men. Mr. Lorrimer faced the *vacarme* for some time, trying to speak. If he still continued to hold firmly to his theory of the land for the people he must have strong convictions, for this section of the people pelted him with their sweetest favours for a prolonged period. By-and-by he folded his arms, looked very pale and scornful, and stared at them.



“Grand!” observed Peril, in an excited whisper. “Much he cares for them! Oh, doesn’t he look fine? These are the people that Hugh is always upholding.”

“Poor wretches!” said Miss Hankinson, not less excited, though much quieter. “If they were not quite so ignorant and so miserable, they might behave differently.”

Mr. Lorrimer’s defiant aspect and steady stare at last produced a pause in the groaning and yelling. His supporters took advantage of it to sing lustily a stave of “He’s a jolly good fellow.” They were soon drowned in a new and much stronger outburst of shrieks, hoots, yells, hisses, and groans. The most unearthly calls resounded from every part of the building. The whole gallery surged about underneath us just like real waves of a troubled sea. Every now and then it seemed as if it must inevitably go over and break upon the heads of those below, but it did not.

The area of the hall was in a state of chaos ; and at last I beheld a long black thing slowly rising up, and after a little while discovered that our Irish friends below, with two long benches, were charging full broadside into the ranks of the others. I dare say not one in a hundred knew what it was all about ; but some had come intending to support Lorrimer and his friends, and others, the majority, to oppose him, and this was how they carried it out. The Jingo part of the mob retaliated by driving other benches end-foremost into their assailants, and routing them effectually.

‘ Foiled in their attempt to clear the decks of the supporters of the grand old system of land-tenure, as at present existing, the Irish party uplifted their voices and sang “ The wearing of the Green.” I don’t know how it is that that song always sets my whole being in perturbation ; I could laugh, and I could

cry, too—it is like the people of the land from which it springs.

‘ Looking towards the platform just then, I saw that Mr. Lorrimer, bent nearly double, was stooping down delivering his speech into the ear of a solitary reporter, who had clambered upon the table, and was taking it down. His brethren of the press, who sat round the table, and could not hear a syllable, were waiting till he should come down and share it with them. Some gentlemen were consulting with the chairman, I suppose, as to what was best to be done, and one or two voices were uplifted, demanding to know where the police were. Just at that moment a man, who was inflamed with rage at the idea of any man being allowed to make a speech which he did not understand, and thought he did not agree with, was inspired to roar out :

“ He’s talking high treason and blas-

phemy, d—n him ! Pull him down ! Go for the platform !”

‘ And with one wild yell—the articulation, I suppose, of the always-present feeling, the wild-beast rage of these people—they *went* for the platform ; and, I must confess, it was not a pleasant spectacle. I gave a glance at the two girls. Peril was deadly pale, but was leaning forward, straining towards the platform ; her eyes were fixed upon Hugh, I know, who was just behind Mr. Lorrimer, and was fighting to get in front of him. Miss Hankinson had moved from the front of the box a little into the background, and sat looking very pale, her handkerchief rolled up in her hand, and her eyes also fixed on the platform. She is not a coward. She had been enjoying the row before ; we all had, I am ashamed to say. She caught my eye, and shook her head with a sickly smile.

“ I thought they had arranged with the

police ? I wonder where they are ?" she said ; and, unable to remain still, went to the front again.

'None of us spoke ; the yelling was not so persistent and so hideous as it had been, but the onslaught upon the platform was terrific. We saw that Hugh at last got in front of Mr. Lorrimer, and smashed down a great hulking fellow who was scrambling up. He went down with a crash. Peril clapped her hands, Miss Hankinson held her breath ; and then, down it came, from the sublime to the ridiculous, with one light tripping step. There was a moment of comparative silence after Hugh had sent this fellow sprawling on his back, and in it he uplifted his voice, and shouted :

"A force of police will be here in five minutes, and orders have been given to turn out the gas if the meeting does not begin to disperse instantly."

‘It acted like magic. The triumphant hoots and groans gave place to a dejected murmuring silence. The gallery audience made a rush, with one accord, for the nearest door ; all the fighting now was to see who could get out first. The same was going on below. A fine thing, Katty, my dear, is an English mob—or any mob, I dare say ; but I speak of what I know. The police began to arrive, and, under their persuasions, the valiant defenders of the heaven-given rights of our great landed proprietors dispersed ; but, after all, not till they had accomplished their purpose—set up mob-rule, and effectually foiled the object for which the meeting had been called. It was at an end when the disturbance was over.

‘Hugh made a signal that he was coming to join us. Very soon he did. We congratulated him heartily on his prowess, and I ventured to hope that persecution would only

strengthen the aims and zeal of the Society. To which he made very little answer ; and so delicious was the fresh open air when we got out that we agreed to walk home. Outside we were joined by a friend of Mr. Hankinson's, who walked with him. Hugh and Miss Hankinson were in front, and Miss Nowell and I behind.

'As we walked along she said to me, suddenly :

"What do you think of Miss Hankinson?"

"I like her," said I, on purpose to draw her out.

"So does Hugh," she said drily.

'I don't know whether it showed want of moral courage on my part, but I endeavoured to comfort her by glossing this over.

"Oh yes!" I said, in a man-of-the-world tone. "Like lots of other young men without much experience, he thinks himself in love with a fascinating woman older than himself.

Numbers of them do it ; it is a good sign, I think. It keeps them in good company in the days of their youth, and then the illusion fades away ; the beloved object marries, or something happens. They come to themselves, and marry suitably, all the better for their friendship with such a woman in earlier days."

"I believe if Hugh imagined himself in love with a person, he would ask her to marry him."

"If he asks Miss Hankinson"—I felt her hand spring aside on my arm, and I was sorry for her—"I feel sure she will refuse him."

"What makes you think so?" she asked eagerly.

"Well, perhaps she might not care for him enough," I said, and nearly added, "however impossible you may imagine that to be."



“Oh—h,” was the cautious reply.

“Or she may be high-principled, and feel that it would not be for his advantage to marry her.”

“Well, I don’t think it would—do you?”

“It is utterly impossible for me to judge of that.”

“Yes, of course,” she said, and gave a sigh; and we said no more about it, but presently separated at the Hankinsons’ door.

‘Three things are palpable to me—plain as the sun in the heavens, as they say, only I never can tell why, in this climate—first, that Peril Nowell is very much in love with her cousin Hugh, in her moody, impassioned way. I think I have said as much as this before. Next, that Hugh imagines himself, at any rate, very much enamoured of Miss Hankinson. Third, that Mr. Hankinson, from what reason or reasons whatsoever, is desirous above everything that his daughter should

marry young Nowell. Another thing in which they are all ardently united—though they can hardly say so outright—is the extreme longing for freedom from bondage, by means of old Mr. Nowell's death. Other things, which I am not at all sure about, are, the reason why both these young women find my good Hugh so attractive. No doubt it is carping and ill-natured on my part, but I would like to see him put through his facings before relying implicitly upon him as a warrior or a champion in the battle of life. He means well, I have not the least doubt ; but I feel inclined to say of him sometimes, "Methinks he doth protest too much." Another thing I am not sure of is, whether Miss Hankinson would marry him, even if she cared for him a great deal ; whether Peril will quarrel with her, or keep quiet ; and lastly, how it will end, and what will become of them all before it is settled, is a greater

mystery to me than all the rest put together. I write as an outsider, seeing more of the game than they do. And now, good-night. When we have another meeting of the Society for the Nationalization of the Land in Great Britain and Ireland, I will let you know.'

['There is one thing,' reflected Mrs. Woodfall, as she finished this epistle, 'of which I am perfectly certain, and that is that if he were not very deeply interested himself, despite his protestations against it, my brother Paul would assuredly never write such sheets and sheets of gossip to me—pure gossip about people of whom I know nothing. I begin to be as curious as himself as to how it will end.']





## CHAPTER VII.

### LAWFORD'S PROPHECY TESTED.

**L**ESS than a week after this turbulent meeting, Margaret Hankinson sat alone at her writing-table, in the evening. Her subject was 'Some Aspects of Darkingford Working Life.' It was one with which she was well qualified to deal, and her heart was in it. Her paper was first to be read at a Literary and Philosophical Society, and then published in a review. Her pen flew quickly along in a somewhat ardent peroration, in which she apostrophized the girls and the women of England, telling them that they were the

real overseers of the poor, and pointing out in what way they could best fulfil this office.

‘ Mr. Hugh Nowell, ma’am, to see you.’

She started up and peered a little through the obscurity, for she had no light except that of the reading-lamp which stood on her table.

‘ I’m disturbing you,’ he said, pausing, and, as Lawford would have said, dissembling, for he rejoiced to see her alone, and had not the least intention of removing the disturbance.

‘ No, never mind ; my language was becoming a little inflated, I fancy. It will do it no harm to be reconsidered.’

‘ Is Mr. Hankinson out ?’ asked Hugh, a look of satisfaction on his face.

‘ Yes ; he has to attend a finance committee at the chapel to-night, so he went straight there. Finance committees seem to be provocative of hunger, and they have what Deacon Cash calls a “ good square meal ”

arranged in the vestry, which they eat before proceeding to business.'

'Ah!' The young man looked up at the ceiling, down upon the floor, into the fire—anywhere except at Margaret. The flames flickered brightly upon his dark, handsome face, and shone into a pair of fine, deep eyes. Margaret had placed herself in a chair at the other side of the fireplace, and was playing with her watch-chain. It seemed as if for a long time now she had been accustomed to hear her waiting-maid's voice announcing 'Mr. Hugh Nowell, to see you;' and with an aimless triviality she began to wonder if the maid herself had remarked upon it, to such inanity may our thoughts descend.

'I'm glad he is out,' said Hugh, in his usual decided tone. 'I wanted to have a chat with you. I'm going to London in a few days.'

'Are you? On business?'

‘Partly. I intend to take a little amusement too. I shall put up with an old chum of mine, who lives there now.’

‘Shall you be long away?’

‘A fortnight, at the outside. I shall not be sorry when it’s over. I am very well satisfied with Darkingford.’

‘You have no business to be satisfied with Darkingford.’

‘Haven’t I! It shows a deficiency in greatness of soul, I suppose. Well, I must go on being deficient in greatness of soul. Besides, it is not such pleasant work that I have to do in London, I can tell you. Seeing stock and share-brokers, and settling about investments for somebody else, who thinks he’s defrauded if he does not get a hundred per cent. for his money—it isn’t exhilarating.’

‘I dare say. I should call it nervous work.’

‘So should I, if I didn’t think it contemptible to be nervous about things. It’s easier by a long way to cut off the coupons of a good investment and send them in at the half year, than to purchase the said coupons—for somebody else, as I said.’

‘Yes; allow me to wish you well out of all your difficulties, and that you may invest successfully—on, I suppose, Mr. Nowell’s behalf?’

Hugh nodded, and then returning to the former topic :

‘You scold me for being content with Darkingford; but I suppose what’s good enough for you ought to satisfy me.’

‘What absurd nonsense!’

‘I can’t think it nonsense.’

‘You will be a man of property some day, with a career, and the great world open before you. You have no right to let your horizon be bounded by Darkingford. I am



a woman, who has found a little work to do here—enough for her strength ; therefore, I am contented.'

'If you will agree to be dissatisfied with it, so will I.'

Margaret changed the subject.

'Is Mr. Nowell very well ?'

'As well as usual—or perhaps I ought to say, as ill as usual,' he replied.

'And your cousin ?'

'Peril is quite well too. I am so glad that she came here, and that we went to that meeting the other night.'

'Though you did want to force us to return home.'

He laughed, with a rising colour.

'It was stupid,' he owned, 'but I couldn't bear the idea of your being spectators of a row, or getting a push, or anything like that ; but I was going to say, that it has brightened Peril up wonderfully. She has

been quite a different girl ever since, so bright and animated, and even laughing.'

As a simple matter of fact, Peril had taken in, almost at one comprehensive glance, the relative situations, emotional and actual, of Margaret and Hugh, and had begun instinctively to fight the former with weapons as nearly like her own as her very different nature could produce. She had realized, without actually telling herself, that perhaps her own gloom and sullenness had made Margaret's even serenity more attractive to Hugh, and she had begun the uphill fight with her own moodiness in right earnest ; it had given her a sort of object in life, and had produced the change which had struck Hugh.

' Please tell me something about that Mr. Lawford, whom you brought here the other night. Is he a friend of yours ?'

' How did you like his looks ?'

' Cautious ! I liked his looks very much.

That was exactly what I did like about him. His looks pleased me better than his talk.'

'That's just the case with me,' said Hugh eagerly. 'I like him, and yet I feel sometimes as if I ought not to like him; I can't make out whether he would be a hero or a villain, he talks so queerly.'

'I should say he would want a great deal of goading to be anything at all, hero *or* villain, and then it might be touch and go. His looks proclaim the hero; his talk is *blasé* and a little affected, I think.'

'I quite agree with you. I don't believe a man when he makes it out that he cares for nothing, and wishes for nothing.'

'Because you care for, and wish for so many things. I dare say he is a much nicer and better man than he would have one suppose. The other night—you must excuse the freedom of the remark—I was quite fascinated with him and your cousin; they

are such very beautiful persons. He is not anything like her—neither so splendid-looking nor so uncommon-looking ; but still, he is handsome enough to be far above the average, and the two together were delightful to look at.'

'They are handsome, yes,' said Hugh, with sublime indifference. 'You always harp so upon beauty and beautiful people ; for my part, I think beauty, and the influence of beauty, are immensely overrated.'

Margaret could not repress a little burst of laughter, musical, like everything uttered by her voice.

'How kind of you to say so,' she said, laughing still, with a light of humour in her fine grey eyes. 'I feel the compliment deeply. It is like assuring a person, who is under a cloud, that you will continue to think well of him, whatever people may say.'

'Continue to think well of you!' echoed

Hugh, flushing violently, starting from his seat, and beginning to pace vehemently about.

‘Please don’t upset my new little ebony table in your agitation, because it has made me very happy, and——’

‘If you knew what you make me feel like when you talk in that way!’

‘Make you feel like! *What* do you mean?’

‘You talk sometimes as if you were the plainest woman in the world, instead of one of the most beautiful.’

‘My dear Hugh!’ she said, in a tone of good-natured but somewhat patronizing banter, which might or might not be assumed, ‘you must excuse me if I tell you that you are really talking nonsense; and whether I am beautiful or ugly, I don’t see why I should be made to listen to that. Let us talk about something else.’

‘No; I will not talk about something else,’

he said, stopping in his promenade, and standing straight in front of her.

Margaret leaned back in her chair with the screen in her hand, and looked up into the lad's handsome face. Despite his indignant expostulations, she was not beautiful with any beauty except that of fine intellectual eyes, and an expression of mind which must have redeemed any face from real plainness. But she was pale, and the lines and contours of her face were not those of beauty ; her features were too marked, and the flesh that clothed them followed too faithfully their hollows to admit of actual beauty in her countenance ; and her hair, though wavy, was light, almost colourless, giving her a somewhat ghostly look. She had a fine figure, and beautifully formed white hands. So much for her physical appearance. Mentally and morally she was well endowed, perhaps even in the aristocracy of that invisible world ; she had

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‘The reason calm, the temperate will,  
Endurance, foresight, strength and skill,’

which are such excellent qualities, and which, when possessed by a woman, are seldom allowed to rust for want of use. The weak-kneed and the strongly-selfish of her own and the other sex invariably and inevitably find out such a woman, and see that her exceptional qualities shall have fair play.

He was undoubtedly and exceedingly handsome, only less so than his cousin Peril. He was tall, and broad, and stalwart, had a manly active grace in his movements, and a pleasant music in his voice. His dark face had a rich colour mantling beneath the bronze, and his eyes had the glamour and the brightness of the eyes of youth ; they had seen no spectres as yet, nor had to outstare any horrors of care or poverty, or to face any phantom of disgrace. If he were conceited, it was with a generous kind of conceit, with which was not mixed

any vanity about looks or personal qualities ; it was a kind of glory in his strength and prospects, and a happy certainty that he was going to make a very good and admirable use of both. Where intellectual points came, he made no pretensions. He bowed himself before Margaret in these matters : on social questions, which she had studied and he had not ; in things relating to art and literature, and even general information, he gave way with a gracious and graceful eagerness which went to her heart, in spite of her better judgment.

Lately she had been forced to see that his thoughts had taken a stride, which had carried them into regions of closer relationship than that of friendship alone. She had had a little thrilling feeling that there was a moment, placed somewhere in the dim future—a moment at which they would sometime or other arrive in the course of their travels, and



that when it struck she would hear of this change and advance in his views. But she by no means imagined that this moment was anywhere near; she always pictured it as being leagues away in the distant future. Even when he stood before her and said, 'No; they would not talk of something else,' she did not realize that they had already got to it.

'I am tired of hearing you talk about beauty as if it were the supreme thing,' he said.

'I am afraid, then, that you will have to listen to a good deal of tiring talk before you grow old.'

'When I know that it is nothing of the kind. There is my cousin Peril, for instance. How beautiful she is! Everyone who meets her in the street turns to look at her—and very annoying it is, sometimes. But what is she? She is not enchanting. She cannot

see with your eyes, nor understand with your brain, nor feel with your heart, Margaret.'

If it is a triumph for a woman who is past her first youth, and who never possessed beauty, to be ardently praised at the expense of one who is beautiful exceedingly, and in the full prime of youth, then Margaret had such a triumph now; the thing was, she had no feeling of reality in the matter. She said, hastily :

'Hush, please! You must not go so far as that.'

'But I must. I came on purpose to go as far—and further. I suppose people would say, if she stood beside you, that she was as beautiful as a goddess, and that you were—*not* as beautiful as a goddess. But when one knows the minds and the thoughts behind the faces and the eyes! Perhaps she is like a goddess; I am sure she is as unreal to me as the most mythical one that ever moved in

a pagan Olympus. But you, Margaret,' he went on, with a tremble in his voice, 'I've thought about you by day and by night—waking and sleeping. Sometimes I've thought your face was the most beautiful thing about you.' (Margaret had cast down her eyes, and sat quite still, listening to him; thinking how much in earnest he was, and wondering why it all felt so unreal to her.) 'Sometimes it is just your eyes that haunt me, and sometimes your voice. And then again I think, "No; if one could see her mind one would get at the real secret of it all." But as for me, I find you, yourself—your whole self—more beautiful than anyone else; and I dare say it is very presumptuous in me, but I shall never be contented, Margaret, unless you will give that self to me—and marry me.'

'You don't know what you are saying,' she answered, in an almost inaudible voice.

Had she not often wondered if there were any man in the world capable of caring for a woman in the sense in which one would care for a gem more than for the casket that held it? It seemed as if here was one who could; and not a *blasé*, life-worn man, who had tried everything and found it dust and ashes, and discovered at last that an helpmeet for him would be the most profitable investment he could make; not this, but a bright, young, strong spirit, selecting of his own free choice spiritual rather than carnal things. But the voice of her conscience, or of her judgment, or of doubt—conventional doubt—whichever the reader likes, told her to be on her guard, so she told him he did not know what he was talking about.

Without paying any attention to her words, he went on earnestly, and with a naïve eagerness to recommend himself to her which both touched and fascinated her :

‘I haven’t much to offer you yet, except my precious self; but you know all about me, as I stand here before you; and I swear to you that there is nothing in all my life that I would wish to conceal from you—there is not a thing that I fear for you to know. I know there are fellows who marry, and there are whole chapters in their lives which they would rather that anyone knew than their wives; but if it were so with me, I’d rather die than ask you to take me, Margaret.’

Margaret’s lips quivered a little. She was not insensible—and no woman could have been, to such a bright and chivalrous youthful love—to the knowledge that perhaps all womanhood was glorified in one man’s heart, simply through her individual influence.

‘Do not think I don’t know the value of your love,’ she began, rather tremulously.

‘Show me that you do then, by saying you will do what I wish,’ he urged her,

taking her hand, and looking at her with eyes that besought, so that she found their pleading most potent.

It was with an immense effort that she at last, as softly as possible, brought forth the words:

‘No, Hugh ; I can’t do that.’

‘Not at first, perhaps. I quite expected that,’ was the somewhat disconcerting reply.

‘But sooner or later, Margaret—you will ?’

‘I think — never,’ she answered indistinctly, feeling as if she must burst into tears ; feeling such a dreary aching creep into her heart at the idea that he might perhaps take her at her word, and accept her dismissal of him, and go away, and not come back again.

It was what she was going to tell him to do ; but when it came to the point, and she thought that he might obey, she cringed in spirit from the process.

‘Never—you think. But you will tell me why; a man has a right to ask that,’ he said, very softly and gently, so that all her good reasons seemed to melt away, and nothing to be left but weakness and the desire to be foolish, and yield.

How was she to do without his bright presence in her life? Then she braced herself up suddenly, and told herself she was a fool and a coward, and a traitor to that larger womanhood which she had set up before her as her hope and her goal in life, and to the consummation of which it was desirable *not* to succumb to the prayers of a boy who had seen nothing of the world, knew no society, and could therefore by no means know his own mind in the true sense of the word. To take him at his word in this, his first ardour, would be cruelty indeed, and she said :

‘Yes, Hugh; you have a right to know my reasons, and I dare say they will appear

very prosaic and insufficient to you ; but you see, we look at things from two very different stand-points. Dear Hugh, you must remember that I am older than you are.'

'And therefore wiser, and better able to guide me.'

She smiled, involuntarily.

'Men may think they want guiding, when they are only very much in love. They are apt to change that opinion afterwards. The earth is theirs and the fulness thereof, and they don't want a woman to keep showing them how to get possession of it.'

'You mean, that you think I could *change*,' he apostrophized her, with reproach in his voice, and indignation lightening through sorrow in his eyes.

'Never, in your good heart and your high and generous spirit. Those are things which are born with a man or a woman, and which do never change, thank God ! But with the



mind, and the feelings about particular things it is different, and——'

'Then my mind will grow nearer to yours, and not further from it,' he answered triumphantly.

'For that very reason, it will want as a companion something quite different.'

'Some more reasons,' he said. 'You can't expect me to submit to that one, and to say that very likely you are right, I shall probably soon be fickle, and had better not persevere.'

She shook her head, smiling a little.

'Another one is, that while you have all life before you, and all your opinions to form, I have long had fixed convictions, and at my age am not likely to alter them, or, for that matter, to be able to alter them. Hear me out,' she added, as she saw he was going to speak. 'It is one of my very strongest convictions that when a woman marries she

ought to study her husband's will and wishes in everything, that she may modify her own ideas as much as possible to suit his—as he should also study to meet her wishes wherever he can. In all the happy marriages I have known, this has been one of the reasons for that happiness. Now—pray forgive me for saying so—I do not choose to begin now to study the will and wish of—well, your will and wish. If I really thought I was indispensable to your happiness, I would—but oh, Hugh, I know I am not. It is not your fault, nor mine ; it is how men and women are made : it is so, once for all ; and being so, I shall do best for both of us if I keep my life for myself, and leave you to work out yours in freedom.'

'You think my will and wish so contemptible ?'

'They are not in the least so ; but I am resolved that they are, and shall be, nothing

in my life, beyond those of a friend. I will not be ruled by them. Both for your sake and my own, I am resolved upon this ; and you, when you have lived a little longer, will say I was quite right.'

'What you say is splendid, as logic and common-sense, Margaret ; but I love you, and it doesn't convince me one bit. I won't tease you any more now. I told you I was going away. You will not give me your final answer till after I have returned, will you ?'

'If you like, I will, after your return, repeat what I say now. I can't promise you any other answer.'

'We will see,' said Hugh. 'I think differently ; and I will tell you why.' Margaret had risen, and they stood facing one another, both pale, both determined-looking. 'You have given me reasons why you won't have me, which reasons I am bound to

respect. But one you have not given me ; if you had, it would silence me for ever, and I could not have another word to say.'

'Well, what is that?' she asked, in a low voice.

'You have never said that you did not love me,' said Hugh, looking her straight in the eyes, with a smile which pierced through every flimsy disguise of hers.

Margaret's lips moved, but no sound issued from them. They would not frame the denial of her love for him. She knew that she did love him—against her will, against her judgment, against her principles and her pride—the pride she took in her freedom, her independence, and her sufficiency unto herself. At that moment humiliation was stronger far than love ; she felt ashamed of herself, indignant with her weakness, and with the knowledge that she was

unable to look this lad in the eyes and tell him he had no power over her.

‘You have never said your heart is not mine,’ he went on, after a long pause. ‘And if you did, I should not believe you. How can you refuse to give me what is yours no longer? It isn’t kind, Margaret, to play with me like this, as if I should do you a wrong or betray you if you said you loved me. You do ; you have nothing but the husk left ; the substance is *mine*.’

‘Go, go!’ she said, almost inarticulately. ‘Leave me, Hugh! Go away, I *command* you ; unless you want me to hate you!’

‘I will go, but I shall see you again after I come home,’ said Hugh, stooping and kissing first one of her hands, and then the other. And with a final ‘good-night’ he obeyed her behest, and left her alone.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### UNEXPECTED COERCION.

**A**T the sound of the door closing after Nowell, Margaret, with a little half-inarticulate sound, made a step towards it; then paused and drew back. Her work was effectually stopped for the rest of the evening—essay, peroration and all. She sat down again in the chair she had occupied all the time that Hugh had been haranguing her, and began to reflect and wonder, to debate and to argue within herself, as to how she was to carry this thing through. As a matter of bald and prosaic truth, her reason for refusing to marry Hugh was, that she distrusted him; not his

good heart, as she had said to him, nor his generous spirit, but his self-knowledge and his constancy. And even now, though thrilling with what he had told her, though feeling still the electric shock given by the pressure of his hands upon hers, and feeling her gaze waver and grow unsteady beneath the ardour of his look, she distrusted him still ; she felt still that to remain persistent in her refusal would be for her the wiser part. As she had said to him, she was not necessary to him ; he might suffer now, if she said him nay, but—Margaret smiled rather faintly to herself—could there be any question as to which of them would continue longest to feel regret and yearning ? Not for a moment. He would go out into the world, and find it beautiful, and get indemnified in a thousand ways for his disappointment. She would stay at home with her father, and pursue her appointed career, and time would doubtless

bring to her the conviction that she had this night done wisely and well; though before that conviction came, it was probable that more than once she would wish she had been three years younger, or somewhat more beautiful. It would be a meaningless, unreasonable wish—equivalent to wishing she was some one else—and perhaps at the same time not an unnatural one.

Margaret Hankinson had had a happy youth and young womanhood; her father had always been peculiarly fond of her, and indulgent to her. The kindly, commonplace man, with mediocre mind and regular, prosy middle-class habits, had been proud of his daughter's abilities and superior cleverness. He did not understand the greater number of what he called, in no sneering tones, her crotchets—they were perfectly incomprehensible to him—but he was quite sure that since she cared for them, they must be worth



something in some way, and he did his part to the furthering of them: supplied her liberally with money to carry them out. Her cleverness was his pride and delight, and he took pleasure in catching hold of any person, man or woman, who was understood to be clever, or original, or remarkable, and bringing them up to see her. If he could not understand them, or make out what they were driving at, Margaret could, without the shadow of a doubt. He quite understood that her opinions on some points were considered unorthodox—nay, must be unorthodox. Did she not eschew any attendance at Ebenezer, the saving strength of whose ordinances it had never entered his head to doubt? He had heard her talk about philistines and philistinism; he had no real idea what it meant, but he always associated it in his own mind with Goliath of Gath, and little David with his sling and his stones.

Perhaps Margaret was little David, and intended to slay the Philistine with some moral stone and sling of whose nature he was ignorant. It was doubtless an allegory, for she was very clever, and whether her opinions 'went against' her or not, she did not seem to mind; she appeared to be very happy as she was.

Margaret, on her side, was deeply devoted to the father who had all her life shown her kindness and indulgence, and had furnished her with the means of indulging tastes and following pursuits just because she loved them, though, had they been explained to him, they probably would not have recommended themselves very strongly to him. She had always repaid this generosity and indulgence by consulting, and if possible anticipating, his wishes; she never obtruded her own ideas upon him, where they differed from his; she yielded in all things like that

of the meeting the other night, when he had announced that he did not like her to go unprotected by his presence. She loved him much, and often congratulated herself on the fate which had given her such a father : so honest, so upright, so charitable and unselfish ; better in his plain, homely unpretentiousness, so she often told herself, than some gilded sham, whose appearance was glittering, and whose brilliance concealed a hollow void. It was a very happy household, that in Queen Street, though it consisted of but two persons. Variety and company, and pleasant talk, were seldom wanting there, and the free-thinking daughter and the orthodox father lived on the very best of terms. He — Mr. Hankinson — was, and always had been, a strict chapel-goer, and a deacon ; a man of much weight in the counsels of Ebenezer. It may be said by the initiated that certain dissenting sects are

apt to be somewhat inquisitorial in the matter of the conduct of their members. How was it that Mr. Hankinson's daughter should so long have been defying the laws of the sect to which her father belonged ; neglecting its ordinances ; setting at nought its burnt-offerings, in the shape of bazaars and tea-parties—ignoring it, in fact, and he never be expostulated with in the matter ? Amongst 'the people called Friends,' it is customary for certain grave and reverend members, male and female, to make yearly pilgrimages or excursions amongst members of the body, and give them homilies on their spiritual and material affairs, engage in prayer with them, reprove them if they have shown signs of wrong-doing, and—marked characteristic of the solid worldly wisdom which pervades the piety of these admirable religionists—exhort them, if they have not already set their worldly affairs in order, to do so without loss

of time. Why, then, had not Mr. Hankinson been taken to task by a much more bigoted body than the Friends, for not causing his daughter to regulate her behaviour and expressed opinions a little more in conformity with his own? For the very simple reason, which he knew, and they knew, and she knew, and everybody else knew, though they never said anything about it—the reason that Brother Hankinson was a solid man, whose good income and small family made him able to afford substantial help to the ‘body,’ and the minister, and the chapel, and a man whose withdrawal from their ranks would very grievously incommode Ebenezer, and all connected therewith. So, without any large demonstration of words, the heresy was winked at. Ebenezer, with Deacon Robert Hankinson at the head and front of its affairs, went on its way; Margaret went on hers, and no one was any the worse, while a great

many were decidedly the better for it—those poor, for instance, to whom Margaret devoted a great deal of the time which might otherwise have been taken up in the vain ceremonies which are just as common in dissenting chapels as in ritualistic churches.

She thought about his goodness now, as she sat, half sad, half happy, after Hugh's departure, and said to herself that, let come what come might, she had a friend and a companion who would never be fickle, never fail her. And while she was thus occupied, the door opened, and Margaret, turning her large, wet eyes towards it, saw that father of whom she had even now been thinking.

‘Aha, Margery—why, have you been crying, my girl?’

He stopped abruptly, as he more fully comprehended the fact that his daughter's cheeks were wet and her eyes glistening. She could not deny that she had wept, but

she recovered herself with an effort, dried her eyes with her handkerchief, and said that it was nothing.

‘You don’t usually cry about nothing,’ he said, coming nearer to her, and looking very seriously at her.

Margaret, now quite mistress of herself, smiled, went up to him, laid her hand upon his arm, and gave him the kiss with which she was wont to greet him on his return home in the evening.

‘How did your finance committee go off? and was the meal “square” enough to satisfy Deacon Cash?’

Mr. Hankinson propped himself with his back against the mantelpiece, and surveyed her. He was a fresh-complexioned man, with grey whiskers and moustache—not a bad-looking man, though his eyes and nose were both too small. It was certainly not from him that Margaret had inherited her

splendid grey eyes, and large, meditative gaze.

‘The meal was right enough, and so was the committee,’ said he, still looking rather sharply at her; ‘but it’s quite contrary to my notions to go out to a meeting, and when I get home to find you looking so odd, and with tears on your face.’

‘My dear father, pray think nothing about it. I’ve been writing a paper. It excited me; I wanted to say something to women that should go home to them, and make them feel, and you can’t do that without the expenditure of any emotion whatever.’

‘Can’t you? Have you been alone all the evening?’

‘No, not all the evening.’

‘Who have you had? Some one in distress, telling a pitiful tale, I suppose, and making you cry?’

The temptation to say ‘yes’ was very



strong, for she felt a profound unwillingness to reveal the real nature of her visitor's errand that evening. But she said :

‘No. At least, it was only Hugh Nowell.’

‘I’m glad you said that.’

‘Why?’ she asked, struck by something peculiar in his manner, and wondering what possible interest he could have in the matter,

‘It shows me that I can depend upon you. If you had taken the fancy to say what wasn’t true, for instance, I should have found you out ; for I met him a few minutes ago, just turning into Great North Street, and he said he had been here.’

Mr. Hankinson spoke in a tone of something like triumph, as if he thought Margaret had been intending to tell him a falsehood, and had escaped detection by great good luck. She looked earnestly at him, more surprised than ever, and saw that there was some indefinable change in his manner and

appearance, corresponding to this inexplicable difference in his way of speech. This change chilled her and made her uncomfortable, she knew not why.

‘Why should I wish to tell you an untruth, father?’ she asked gently, but in some bewilderment. Then she began to wonder if by any chance Nowell, on meeting her father, could have told him what had passed. In a moment she felt that this was highly improbable; so improbable that she dismissed the idea from her mind, and was reduced to wondering again what, in vulgar parlance, could have ‘come over’ her father, to make him treat her in this manner.

‘How long is it since he went away?’ asked Mr. Hankinson, not answering her surprised question.

‘I really don’t know. It cannot be long, since you say you met him at the corner of Great North Street.’

‘Ay, that’s true. Ten minutes say, now, since I stopped and spoke to him. When I meet him, he’s whistling a tune, like any black-bird, fairly as if his heart was overflowing with joy. Then I come straight away home, and find my daughter in tears, brooding over the fire ; things that don’t happen once in five years, and never both at once, so far as I know. Don’t you think I should be a fool, Margery, if I didn’t begin to put two and two together?’

‘I don’t know, I’m sure.’

‘Do you cry with grief because he didn’t say what he ought to have said, or with joy because he did?’

‘Really, neither one nor the other. I—how—what do you mean?’ she asked, in a tone of something like irritation, as her bewilderment grew greater and greater. It was not thus that he was wont to speak to her. This jerky attempt at flippancy was as

unlike his usual homely directness as anything could be, and underneath it all she detected a sort of eagerness, which puzzled her more than everything else.

‘You are generally more open with me than this, and I’m trying to spare your feelings,’ he said. Margaret thought, in a parenthesis, that he adopted a singular method of doing so. ‘But, as it seems you won’t meet me half-way, I must go direct to the point. Did Hugh Nowell ask you to marry him?’

Margaret was thunderstruck. She had not imagined for a moment that her father had been conscious of anything of the kind. He must have been watching both Hugh and her carefully and with interested eyes, and the knowledge that he had done so made her feel alarmed and uneasy.

‘Yes, he did,’ she said slowly.

‘Ah—h—h!’ said Mr. Hankinson, with a

long-drawn breath, which, if not a deep sigh of relief, was the most like it of any sound she had ever heard. He struck his hands together, and the look on his face answered to the expression of his voice. While she was groping about in her mind after the possible meaning of it all, he caught hold of her hand, and in a tone which strove to be cordial and fatherly, but which was actually rapid and anxious, he said eagerly :

‘Then what are you crying for, Margery? —unless they are tears of joy, as I said. Yes, that’s it, I suppose; so they won’t last long, will they? Give me a kiss, my girl. I am very glad; this makes me very happy.’

Then he had been expecting it, looking and waiting for it; he had contemplated the idea with approval, had perhaps encouraged Hugh’s frequent visits with the distinct hope of such a consummation. This idea revolted and in a measure outraged Margaret. She

could say nothing ; the strangeness of it stiffened her tongue, drove back her feelings of affection, and seemed to plant her fast where she stood.

‘Come, child!’ he said, still in the same jerky, unnatural voice. ‘What does this mean? Surely you didn’t quarrel with him as soon as you’d settled everything?’

‘I don’t know what you mean. We—we settled nothing. I told him I could not marry him,’ said Margaret, almost in gasps.

‘What!’ began Mr. Hankinson; and then, after a momentary pause, ‘What foolery is this?’ he asked roughly. ‘Do you mean to tell me that you have been behaving like an idiot?’

‘Father!’

‘Don’t look at me in that way, girl, as if you were blessed with only half your senses. A woman who sets up to be clever ought to know better than to behave in that way.’

Are you shilly-shallying ? or do you mean to tell me right out that Hugh Nowell proposed to you, and you sent him about his business ?

‘He asked me to marry him ; I said no. He asked my reasons ; I gave them. He said he would come for my final answer on his return from London, and——’

‘Ah, that’s all right, then ; though I think you need not have been so delicate about it. I know it used to be considered pretty in a girl to be coy and shy, and say she couldn’t think of such a thing ; but we live in a more practical age now, and all that has passed by. The women are more, the men are fewer ; and yes or no is what is wanted, and to have the field clear. However, there’s not so much harm done. It can be made up when he comes home.’

‘It will not be made up. I told him I could promise him no other answer when he did return.’

‘Well, that was a mistake. You must give him a very different answer.’

‘Do you mean that you are very anxious for me to marry Hugh Nowell?’

‘You must marry him, so that’s all about it.’

‘Why?’

‘I have ample reasons—most adequate reasons.’

‘I think I have a right to ask what they are.’

‘Very important business reasons——’ he began.

‘Father,’ said Margaret, in a tone of sorrow and scorn, mingled, ‘do you seriously mean that you expect me to take a man whom I refused, simply because you say in general terms that there are business reasons? that is a strange view to take of marriage. Business reasons usually concern money : do you mean that you would receive some



pecuniary profit if I disposed of myself to Hugh Nowell ?

An hour before, if anyone had depicted this scene to her, or had prophesied that she would be heard saying things like this to her dear father, she would have looked upon it as an insane dream ; but now, such was the change wrought in her mental and moral attitude, that she flung the words at him with some vigour, in the hope that they might awaken in him some sense of the unusualness of his behaviour, just as one might pour raw brandy by tumblerfuls down the throat of a man fainting from loss of blood. The words which seemed to her so awful that she shook as she uttered them, produced no startling effect upon him ; and it began at last dimly to dawn upon her mind that there was something behind it all—some hidden cause for this strange behaviour ; he had a secret reason pressing upon his mind, which made him

impervious to the usual arguments of reason and common-sense. As he only shook his head and uttered an impatient sound after her tragic question, she suddenly said, coldly and resolutely :

‘I am tired of talking in this way. It means nothing, and it will lead to nothing. I will leave you alone, and try to forget all about it.’

‘Not so fast,’ he said, catching hold of her wrist as she moved away. ‘You don’t seem to me to take in the meaning of what we are talking about.’ Margaret felt her heart sink; it was just what she had been thinking he failed to do—take in the meaning of it. ‘Hugh Nowell will go to London directly. When he comes back, he will want your answer. You will tell him that you have changed your mind, and will marry him, or by G—, Margery, it’s all over between us, and you may fend for yourself as well

as you can ! So now I hope you understand.'

His face had changed. Its fresh colour seemed to have faded ; the cheeks were fallen and wrinkled ; there were folds under the eyes which stared at her with a haggard look—with a look, as it seemed to her, of desperation. A nameless dread took possession of Margaret's spirit. The threat he had uttered fell almost unheeded on her ears. What gave it its terror was the unknown something which must be goading him to say things like this to her—her to whom he had so often said that they two were independent of all the world but themselves. She did not speak, she did not answer him ; she loosed her hand from his grasp, and with averted face got out of the room, and presently found herself somehow in her bedroom, and alone.

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She passed an almost sleepless night, with the heavy conviction in her mind and weighing down her spirit, that to-morrow the horrible strife, which had started up like a spectre between herself and her father, would have to be renewed. The reasons which made him determined that she should marry Hugh Nowell were too urgent, as she had plainly seen from his face, to be disposed of by 'sleeping upon them.' The storm would not have blown over, leaving a clear sky. Her mind was filled with vague and shadowy doubts and terrors of all kinds. Her existence had become literally dust and ashes, and all within the course of an hour's conversation. So great was the dread she felt of what she might hear in the morning, that over and over again she felt a strong temptation to ring, and tell the maid to say she felt ill and could not come downstairs. But then, calling herself a coward, and bracing herself up, she

overcame this feeling, rose at her usual hour, dressed, and went into the breakfast-room. She always retained a vivid recollection of this whole scene ; the morning light of a grey February day, cold and clear, but sunless ; the familiar things of the room ; the breakfast-table spread, the letters and newspapers, and the accustomed face and figure of her father at the foot of the table, with his back to the window. She could not see his face very plainly, just because of that ; but she had a general impression of its looking sad, anxious, and dejected. Just at first, some of the painful impression left by the scene of last night seemed to fade away ; it rolled itself back, like some half-remembered nightmare, and things grew brighter again. But not for long. Her sleepless night had given her a feeling of lassitude and weariness ; her eyes felt heavy and her head ached. It was an almost silent meal. *The* topic was avoided,

because the waiting-maid had to come in once or twice, and this formed a respite for which Margaret was thankful.

When breakfast was over, she took up one of the newspapers; she would look over it, and say something about any news there might be, just to break the painful and unnatural silence of this miserable morning. But before she had time fairly to open it, her father began :

‘Well, Margery, have you slept upon it—our talk last night, I mean?’

‘I have thought about it; I can’t say I have slept much. I was too unhappy to sleep.’

‘That’s a pity. I don’t want you or anyone else to be unhappy, but the very reverse. You have at any rate come to a better way of thinking, I hope.’

‘If you mean that I have decided to recall my refusal to Hugh Nowell, I have not.’

‘Don’t take upon yourself to be obstinately perverse, my girl. It isn’t like you—and it doesn’t pay, in any sense of the word.’

‘Asking for a reason can hardly be called being obstinately perverse. You seem to think that it is a mere nothing to decide upon marrying a person—in the dark—a person whom you don’t wish to marry.’

‘Come, come! You can’t look me in the face and say you don’t care for him.’

She looked at him dumbly, in silent despair, wondering if he were losing his senses. The thing he had just said to her would have made her crimson with shame yesterday—could it be yesterday, and not twenty years ago, that the strife had begun?—now she received it callously; it glided aside, without stinging; seeming only part of the whole inexplicable business.

‘Come, Margery,’ he said, ‘it’s getting time for me to be going down to the office.’

Give me your promise, and let me go with a light heart.'

'You will drive me mad!' she exclaimed passionately. 'How can you ask me such things? You say I must marry Hugh Nowell. I do not say nothing would induce me to marry him; but I do say I will not do so in the dark, and because you say I must. I must have a reason, and one that is a cogent one, before I will think about it.'

There was a brief silence; then, in a singularly quiet and colourless voice, Mr. Hankinson said:

'There is just this reason, that if you don't, I am a ruined man.'

The words, portentous as they were, seemed to fall with no meaning on her ear. She said:

'Ruined, father! In what way could you be ruined, without Nowells' being ruined



too? So long as they are prosperous, I don't see what harm can come to you.'

Another silence, while Mr. Hankinson in his heart felt a kind of mingled pride in her innocence and impatience at her obtuseness. She had not the faintest glimmering of an idea why he should be ruined unless 'Nowells' were ruined also. Talk about the penetration of women—why, no one could be more stonily obtuse than this clever daughter of his.

'Don't you?' he said, at last. 'I've been speculating. Now do you understand?'

'Speculating!' A look of absolute relief dawned upon her face. 'Oh, father! why did you not tell me? You have made yourself poor, and been worrying yourself about ways and means. And have you nothing better to propose than that I should marry Hugh Nowell, to get you out of your difficulties?' In the immense relief she felt,

she laughed aloud. 'Why, if the worst comes to the worst, if you lost all that you have saved, you have still your post, and your salary, and *me*. Do you think I would ever desert you? We'll go into a little house, and I'll do the work with my own hands, and you shall know no difference, except that the rooms will be a trifle smaller. Why didn't you tell me at first?' she added, putting her hands upon his shoulders, and laughing at him. 'It was very naughty of you to think that I would marry anybody, just because we were in difficulties. Oh, never fear, we will pull through. I am a splendid hand where hard work is wanted.'

His face did not lighten; his eyes did not cheer. He looked at her stolidly, and then he wiped his brow with his handkerchief, and she saw that there was a clammy sweat upon it.

'You have let this prey upon your mind

till you have got morbid,' she said; 'and thought there was only one way out of it. Tell me how bad it is, dear. I don't care, I am ready to meet it, and stand by you in it.'

His agony broke out at last in an oath.

'D—n it, Margaret, you might be a fool! Do you think I should care if it was *my* money?'

She turned cold, and trembled where she stood. Her hands slid off his shoulders, and fell down at her sides; and she stared at him, understanding everything now, and perfectly overwhelmed by it now that she did know it.

With the utterance of the last words, he broke down. She saw her father sit down upon the sofa, and cry—cry like a woman. And all she could think of to say was—

'You have betrayed your trust.'

‘Nought of the sort,’ said he, starting up, and looking at her, a broken-down, ghastly-looking figure. And then he went on, in almost incoherent style, rapidly and angrily : ‘What I’ve done, I’ve done for his good. There isn’t common gratitude or decency in the world, with such as him. If I’d been disposed to be dishonest—if I had wanted to “betray my trust,” as you call it, I might have had fine pickings of it, if you like. What do you look at me in that way for ? Did you never hear of cooking accounts ? Not that I’ve done it ; nothing of the kind. I stand to clear fifty thousand pounds by this railway—for him, that is, for him. I might take a little commission ; and I deserve a very big one. But I must have time, and I must have help ; and when Hugh is your husband he’ll be with me heart and soul. I’ve been extending the business—I hate your miserable farthing a pound profits ; a

man is nowhere with them in these days . . . old men, like him, get so cautious. They turn conservative, and don't understand enterprise. Young ones, like his grandson, are different. With his help, I can bring the old man round ; without it, I can answer for nothing—though all that I've been doing I've done for his good, and no one will be more ready than he to clutch at the profits when I hand them over to him. . . . Betrayed my trust,' he added, looking angrily at her, as he repeated her words—'that's a bold thing for a girl to say to her father, and a father like me.'

'Forgive me ! I hardly knew what I was saying. I am glad you have told me. The thing will be to make up with your own money for what you have used of Mr. Nowell's, won't it, and, if necessary, lose your own ? If the speculation turns out well, it will be all right ; but I'm sure you

won't speculate any more with his money, will you ?'

'My money's all tied up, so that I can't get at it in a moment ; no, nor a month,' said he drearily, propping his chin on his hands, and staring before him with the expression which is perhaps one of the most painful sights there can be—that of an elderly man whose pursuit of gain has landed him in insuperable difficulties. The sordidness of the thing he has fixed his mind upon for so long, comes out in the expression on his face.

There is no halo of nobility, or poetry, or romance in it ; it is just the dreary, blank hopelessness—the plain uninviting prose of ignoble grief over an ignoble loss.

'Then let us meet the worst together,' she said steadfastly. 'Whatever Mr. Nowell may say, Hugh will not be hard upon you, I know.'

‘That’s very fine talk,’ he said, pulling himself up from the sofa; ‘it’s fine to talk of “meeting the worst together.” You don’t know what the worst can be, and it need never come at all if you would do your duty.’

‘I know what you mean,’ she said quietly, and not caring to waste any more eloquence or any more indignation on the subject. ‘But it is quite out of the question. I will do any kind of work; anything that is honest. But I will not tell lies, and cheat Hugh, and degrade myself in that way.’

‘No, no! It’s all a matter of self,’ he said, with a feeble sneer, as he pulled his coat across his chest, and put on an attempt at a jaunty air, pitifully unlike his usual careless ease of demeanour. ‘It’s always the way with people who despise Christianity and chapel-going. When I hear people setting down their poor silly old fathers as

superstitious, and talking about the immorality of the popular religion, I look to them to do something sterling in the hour of need, and I find I might just as well lean upon the broken reed talked about in the Scriptures that they despise so much.'

Petty reproaches and stings of a petty mind, as these were, they tore Margaret's heart to pieces. She could not have imagined herself becoming so unhappy as she felt now. Her father turned to the door, saying :

'Well, I wish you a pleasant time with your reflections upon your treatment of me. For my part, I've a clear conscience with regard to you. You may hear of my ruin any day, and you'll have yourself to thank for it.'

He went away. She felt convinced, from his tone, that there could be no immediate danger of 'ruin,' as he called it ; 'exposure' was the disagreeable word which rang in her



ears. She had been so proud of him, not for a genius, or a man of the world, but as a plain, self-made man—one of the ‘people’ whom she loved so, and in whose heart beat the blood that, she would gladly tell herself, filled her heart too. What—she had asked herself many a time—what had all the grandeur, aristocracy, honour in all the world to give, for which she would have bartered her honest, burgher blood, her good, unstained, middle-class name? Nothing, and less than nothing. She had been prouder of her father’s well-won dignity, gained with clean hands in honest trade, than any duke of his ancient coronet; but now, behold, the hands were no longer clean, nor the brow without a stain. He had cheated—yes, that was the word—cheated his employer; proposed to himself that he should screen himself from the consequences of his dishonesty by her marriage with that employer’s heir;

and when she declined to carry out the scheme, he had reproached her for a hypocrite. That was about what it came to. And then the question began to assail her, what was she to do in the matter? Was she to sit silent? or was she—no, it could not be that she would be required to make it known to anyone that he had done wrong. She felt tired of the debate; her head reeled; she at length decided that nothing could be done for the present, at any rate. Her father might have exaggerated as to the difficulty of getting at his own money. When he found she would not fall into his scheme, he would think better of that; he would see that it was not only honesty, but the best policy too, to restore what he had misused.

With the afternoon post she received a note from Hugh Nowell.

‘I am going to London to-night instead of

next week. I reckon on your promise that I shall see you on my return.'

Margaret smiled mournfully. Who could say what might not have happened by the time of his return?





## CHAPTER IX.

### THE GATHERING STORM.

**D**URING the itme when Hugh had been arguing with Margaret Han kinson on the subject of the supremacy or non-supremacy of beauty over mind, Peril, feeling very dull and very bored, had been amusing herself, as she sometimes did, by trying to frighten Mrs. Robson out of her senses. Mr. Nowell, who had been out of sorts all day, had retired early, and the two women were left alone. It will easily be imagined that, considering the terms on which they stood, they were not in the habit of indulging in affectionate or con-

fidential conversations. Indeed, they never did converse, but Peril was sometimes inspired to talk in such a manner as to make Mrs. Robson's flesh creep, so she said. Being a very religious woman, and strongly convinced that she, and all like her, were sheltered by Providence with a very peculiarly great care and favour, it was perhaps not surprising that she should be at the same time exceedingly superstitious. Peril had found out this weakness long ago, and occasionally, when she felt less miserable than malicious, she was tempted to play upon it, to her own great comfort and the very sore dismay of her enemy.

They were alone in the drawing-room ; there was complete stillness over all the house. Mrs. Robson sat by the fire and knitted a grey woollen sock, and meditated apparently. Presently she observed :

‘ I wonder if we shall be able to go anywhere this year for change of air ? I doubt it.’

‘Oh! I think we shall. If he dies, there will be nothing to prevent us; and, if he is well enough, he will want to go away himself.’

‘I have been thinking of Kelsall Bank,’ said Mrs. Robson, naming a peculiarly dreary sea-side resort, so called, on the ugliest part of the west coast, to which they had last year paid a visit of six weeks, during which Peril’s wretchedness had become so great that she had many a time meditated casting herself into the sea, and had told Hugh that she would certainly have done so had it been possible; but that when she considered that in order to drown herself she would have to wade at least fifty yards into the deep, in full view of all the houses on the esplanade, she had given up the attempt as likely to be frustrated, though most of the said houses were empty.

When, therefore, she now heard Mrs. Robson suggest Kelsall Bank, and bethought

herself that if they did decide upon it she would have to go too, and to leave Hugh at home, save for rare intervals, at full liberty to spend as much of his time as he liked with Margaret Hankinson, her heart sank ; and she seemed again to see that waste of grey shallow water, those miles of yellow sands, and the undulating dreariness of the expanse of sandhills behind the little village.

‘ Kelsall Bank is a queer place,’ she said meditatively. ‘ It used to give me the oddest sensations ; at least, I suppose it was the place, I never felt like that anywhere else. Did you never feel odd there ?’

‘ Odd, what do you mean ?’

‘ Creepy and queer,’ said Peril, drawing nearer to the fire with a little shiver.

‘ I really don’t see what there could be in a plain, matter-of-fact place like Kelsall Bank to make *anyone* feel creepy and queer, unless they were very superstitious indeed,’ said

Mrs. Robson loftily, and naturally condemning most strongly her own unconscious weakness.

‘So I used to think,’ said Peril, fixing her great eyes dreamily upon the blaze. ‘I used to look round during the day-time, when every flat ugly thing about the place used to seem to rise up and slap you in the face, and say, “You talk about a beautiful world ; only come here, and you shall see what bad taste Nature can show sometimes.” I used to wonder then where the ghostly things I saw in the dark could possibly come from.’

‘Ghostly things—in a lodging-house !’ said Mrs. Robson, with unmitigated contempt. ‘That is one of the results of being educated in a superstitious religion by nuns, and people who never reason.’

‘Ah ! you never saw the things I am speaking of, I suppose.’

‘Why, what on earth *could* you see ? Did you take the bathing-machines for phantom



ships in the dusk ?' said Mrs. Robson, with graceful badinage.

Peril shook her head with a weird smile.

' I used to sit at that side window—don't you remember we had the very end house on the esplanade, and there were five empty ones between us and the next inhabited one?—I could see a corner of the sea, which was as cold and grey as ashes long after a fire has burnt out, and I could see still more of the sandhills, with the green bents waving about in the wind. I used to watch the darkness creeping upwards out of the sea and out of the sandhills. The darkness there is different from what it is here—it is a real thing ; and I used to observe it gradually spreading its great black, bat-like wings, till it filled up all the hollow, and covered all the sands, and brooded over all the sea. What an enormous creature it must be ; and'—she bent forward, staring into Mrs. Robson's face with

eyes which seemed to be fixed upon other worlds—‘*how does it manage to conceal itself during the day?*’ that is what puzzled me.’

‘Oh, what a nasty creepy notion! I shall never like that end house again!’ said Mrs. Robson.

‘I told you it was an odd place, and you laughed at me,’ said Peril, in a tone of gentle reproach. ‘I was sure, from the queer feeling I had about that one thing, that it was an unusual place. I often feel convinced that the darkness brings a great many things out of their holes which go flying and creeping about. If we could see them we should be frightened, some of us; and there I proved it, you see.’

‘You talk great nonsense!’ said Mrs. Robson, and this time apprehension mingled with contempt in her tones.

‘Oh no! I often feel the same bat-like creature flapping its wings in my own mind;

and it does not need to be night for it to come. But, apart from that, I heard a story there one day which plainly proves that many things take place there which are not easily to be explained.'

'That may be,' Mrs. Robson admitted. 'There are many things which *we* can't explain, if we would only admit it.'

'One day, when we were there, I went out for a walk alone in the afternoon. I went away over the sandhills, and towards some fields where there was a farm ; a man called James Hindle lived there.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Robson, frightened but fascinated.

'I found James Hindle himself at home. He had been suffering from rheumatism, so, as I was tired with my long scrambling over the sandhills, I went in to rest, and they gave me a piece of oat-cake and a cup of milk ; and he told me tales about all the

“boggarts,” as he called them, in the neighbourhood.’

‘Silly, superstitious old man!’

‘Simple he might be, but he was not silly. Superstitious you might call him, but it was nothing *he* had seen. You remember Black Moss?’

‘Ye—yes.’

‘On the other side of the sandhills, to the north-east of his farm. He told me of strange things that had been heard and seen on Black Moss. He said that a few weeks before that, quite late at night, there came a knock at his door, and when he opened it two young men stood there—gentlemen both of them, he declared—quite pale and trembling. They begged for a rest, and he bade them come in and sit down in the ingle-nook, and asked if they had met with an accident, as they seemed so flurried; or, as he said, “fleyed.” And they said no; but that while travelling on

foot along one of the roads over Black Moss, they had suddenly been stopped by seeing something black cross their path. They started back surprised, and looked on ; and what do you suppose it was ?

‘ Oh ! how should I know ? Probably they had drunk too much, and thought they saw things when there was nothing to see,’ said Mrs. Robson, in a tremulous voice.

‘ They were as sober as he was when he told me the tale. What they saw was a funeral procession, and it passed noiselessly by them,’ said Peril impressively, as she eyed her victim to observe the effect upon her of this well-worn scarecrow. ‘ A great hearse, with plumes, mutes, mourning coaches, and then a long array of mourners with scarfs, and hat-bands, and *gloves*, and everything.’

At the ‘ *gloves*, and everything,’ Mrs. Robson gasped, and Peril, with unchanging solemnity of countenance, proceeded :

‘All this in the dead of the night, gliding by, silent as the grave to which it was going. Wasn’t it horrible?’

‘I—I——’

‘The two young gentlemen, whom James Hindle described as strapping young fellows, were so terrified that they could scarcely stand. They clung to each other, and could only gaze at the phantoms—because they must have been phantoms, you know—it was probably a certain sign that one or both of them must die within a given time. And each wanted to make out that the other had seen it first; but James Hindle told them he did not think that mattered. As they had both seen it, they would probably both die. What would you have done if you had seen such a thing?’

‘I—I don’t imagine I should ever have seen anything so silly.’

‘I didn’t know that a funeral was ever

considered silly, exactly,' said Peril, very gravely, 'especially in the dead of the night, in a place like that. It's true I wondered what sort of people they could be, to be having a funeral at midnight; but that is all the stronger proof that it was an omen, I should say.'

Mrs. Robson was silent, but she trembled. Pride forbade her to beg Peril not to tell her any more horrible stories; superstition made her hair stand on end at the history of the funeral procession across Black Moss in the dead of the night. In Peril's pale face, and in the expression upon it, she read, as it were, a whole catalogue of similar stories, or stories surpassing this one. In order to escape, she was about to make some excuse for leaving the room, when the door opened, and Hugh walked in.

'Oh, Hugh, back again!' smiled Mrs. Robson, instantly feeling very valiant.

‘Yes. It is later than I thought. I have been at the Hankinsons’, but I left there ever so long ago, and held a sort of drawing-room on the way home. Met everybody I knew.’

‘Including?’ said Peril.

‘First, Mr. Hankinson——’

‘I thought you said you’d been at Mr. Hankinson’s?’

‘I was, but he was out. There was only Mar—Miss Hankinson at home.’

‘Aha!’ said Peril, bowing her head gently and smiling sweetly, but watching him closely.

‘Then I met Lawford, smoking his pipe under the windows of the house in which you dwell, Peril.’

‘Rather aimless of him, if he does,’ said she, while Mrs. Robson looked up sharply.

‘He sent a message,’ pursued Hugh. ‘I think myself, that he is very hard hit.’

Peril lifted her head, and her lip curled.



‘Who is making silly, vulgar jokes now?’ she asked.

‘I beg your pardon, I’m sure,’ said Hugh, laughing, and laughing, too, so light-heartedly that they both silently remarked upon it. ‘But he really desired his compliments to you.’

‘I am obliged to him. You can give him mine, when next you see him,’ said she.

Hugh presently observed that he was going to do some reading in the library, wished them good-night, and left the room.

It was a little after ten. They were again left alone. Hugh’s brief interruption had dissipated the supernatural terrors, and Mrs. Robson now observed, with a half-laugh, half-simper, such as is commonly affected by persons of her calibre when speaking of love in any of its shapes :

‘Really, Peril, I think there is something in what Hugh says, though you took him up

so shortly ; and a certain gentleman seems to me very much smitten with a certain young lady.'

Peril fixed her eyes upon her, and said gravely : 'Do you think so?'

'I'm quite sure of it. I noticed it even that first night he was here ; and from little things that Hugh has said since, I'm certain of it.'

'Ah ! It is not of much use for anyone to be "struck" with me,' said Peril, in a half-regretful tone, as she leaned her head back, and looked towards the ceiling. 'I often think it would be rather nice to have some one in love with me——'

'Ah, yes,' sighed Mrs. Robson, shaking her head. 'An unselfish affection is a great comfort.'

'Oh, I don't mean anything so namby-pamby as "unselfish affection ;" I mean a great passion, such as one reads of—some-

thing with some life and fire in it. But it's all of no use speculating about such things. If half Darkingsford were ready to fall at my feet, I should still be shut-up tight, like the princess in the brazen tower.'

'Yes, your poor dear grandfather has so outlived his own youth, that he forgets other people can have any. He does not remember how young people feel——'

'I think, when people get so old that they can't remember that, they ought to die,' said Peril distinctly; 'both for their own sakes, and the sake of everybody else.'

Waiving for this occasion her usual conventionally rigid horror of such outspoken disloyalty, Mrs. Robson said:

'If I were Hugh, I should ask Mr. Lawford in quietly now and then. Your grandfather need never know anything about it, and it would be a little amusement for you all; and he is so evidently a gentleman——'

‘That he would be sure to come in to a clandestine supper now and then, if invited,’ put in Peril sweetly. And then she rose. ‘I am going to bed,’ she observed. ‘It’s late. At least, it isn’t late. People in London, and some people here, I dare say, are just beginning their evenings; but in this house, ten o’clock is the signal for release—“the one far-off, divine event” for which we all sigh, as for our salvation, all day long. It has sounded, and I am going.’

Mrs. Robson wished her good-night in a more cordial tone than usual; but Peril, standing quietly before her with hands folded, and speaking in the gentlest of voices, observed:

‘I am so much obliged for your kind hints about Mr. Lawford, but I would like you to spare yourself the trouble of giving me any more. It really isn’t necessary. I don’t intend to play your game in the matter at

all. No doubt Hugh might ask him to supper; no doubt grandpapa need know nothing about it, unless some one were to tell him what was going on, and that I was flirting with a penniless sort of person whom no one knew anything about, and to whom Hugh has given a kind of under-clerk's place at the works. I can just imagine the effect of such a revelation upon him—dear old man! You shall not be tempted, Mrs. Robson; I dare say you pray every night to be delivered from evil, and you shall, so far as I am concerned. Good-night.'

With which speech she departed, leaving her hearer too astounded, too confused, and, as she would herself have said, 'taken aback,' to make any reply. She sat, with her knitting fallen upon her lap, and her hands upon it, for some little time, and then, stamping her foot upon the floor, exclaimed, half aloud:

‘She is a fiend, and I know she will do him a mischief before all is over. I would give my right hand to have her away. And of course, as they are men, and she is good-looking, in her sulky, scowling way, they cannot imagine for a moment that she could or would do anyone any harm. Fools that they are!’

The hatred between Peril and Mrs. Robson was generally of a silent, quiet kind; but when it did clothe itself in words, it flamed up fiercely in both hearts. It was not a flash and over; it rankled and burnt. Mrs. Robson would lie awake to-night, thinking of Peril’s beautiful, vindictive face, and of the words that came from between her clenched teeth, and would be half-afraid of her, half-furious with her, and wholly anxious to get rid of her by some means.

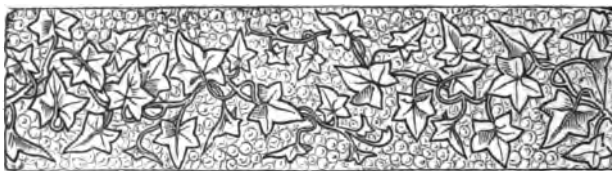
As for Peril—to-night, as on other nights after similar scenes, she whirled off to her

own room, there to pace about brooding, her heart full of cursing ; torn this way and that by a thousand conflicting feelings. To-night, as so often before, the desire rushed over her to escape, to leave this place, to make her way back, over land and over sea, to the quiet cloister where she had been happy. That was her idea one moment ; the next, she had a sense of the futility and the blank hopelessness of any such proceeding. She might go, she might shake the dust of the house in which she dwelt from her feet, but she could not make herself what she had been before. Her woe, her burden, and her heartache would have to go with her, and, in the quiet life there, she would have so much the more time to make intimate companions of them, to nurse them, and cherish them, and become enslaved by them.

‘ I wish I was back again,’ she thought now ; ‘ I wish I was there again, at my chants

and my embroidery, believing everything they told me about God being good, and people being happy who led holy lives. It was stupid, and it wasn't true; but if I had stopped there I should never have known anything different, and it is much better to believe everything than nothing. Now, if some one came and said to me, "God is very good, and loves you," I should laugh, and ask why He lets me be so bad and so miserable. If they said to me, "God rewards holiness with happiness," I should laugh still more, and point to the people round about me, and ask them if they thought I was a fool. I know better than that now ; I know that is all nonsense, but I am miserable. I was happier when I believed it all. I wish I had never been taken away from them.'





## CHAPTER X.

ONCE TOO OFTEN.

**N**OWELL of course knew nothing of the concise little conversation which had taken place between Peril and Mrs. Robson after he left them. No screams or shrieks had heralded the thrust of Mrs. Robson, nor the savage manner in which Peril had beaten down her adversary's guard and stabbed her deep, in return. Had physical blows of similar violence been dealt, it is probable that surgeons on the one hand, and actions for assault and battery on the other, might have been the result. As it was a few quiet words

did the business—not even raised voices, or accents of vituperation. Hugh, in the library below, heard feet quietly moving about, and concluded, if he thought anything of the matter, that the womenkind were going to bed. His slumbers were not disturbed by any inkling of what had passed, though the reading of which he had spoken to them resolved itself into a long, long, and happy reverie, in which he went again over all that had passed between him and Margaret that evening.

But at breakfast on the following morning he was struck by a certain portentous gloom and silence displayed by both. He concluded that they must have found the opportunity, somehow or other, for one of their numerous quarrels; he mentally shrugged his shoulders, and, like other men under similar circumstances, resolved to get away from it all as soon as possible. Which, accordingly, he

did, saying he must be at the office early, as it was market-day. And, asking no questions, and apparently not having observed that anything had gone wrong, he made good his escape, and left them. At the office, also, things seemed somehow to have a cloud over them. Hugh did not know exactly how it was. In the first place, he thought Mr. Hankinson looked very ill, or, as Hugh put it to himself, shaky. He said one or two things quite at random, and went so far as to say he had a headache. But when Hugh remarked upon this, and said that if Mr. Hankinson liked, he would put off his London visit for a time, the manager assured him with almost feverish eagerness that there was no need for anything of the kind. Mr. Hugh was mistaken in thinking him ill ; it was only a passing indisposition : and so far from wishing the visit delayed, it would be well if Nowell went a little earlier rather than

later. Those people in Threadneedle Street wanted attending to very badly, and there were two other pressing calls. He had been thinking of asking Hugh if it would be very inconvenient to him to set off that night.

So far from being inconvenient, it suited Nowell's views admirably ; as Mr. Hankinson intended it should. It would bring him back to Margaret, and, as he hoped, to the successful ending of his suit, almost a week sooner ; and in his present state of heart and mind, a week seemed equivalent to an eternity. He joyfully assured Mr. Hankinson that it would be perfectly convenient to him to set off that night. There was a train at seven, and he would leave the office a little earlier than usual, that was all. He despatched the note to Margaret, telling her of his intention, and, a little after five, reached home.

Going into the house, he looked into both

the downstairs rooms to find Mrs. Robson, and tell her he was going, and ask her to see after his things. He found them empty, and took his way to the drawing-room. The gas was not lighted ; the fire blazed brightly. Old Mr. Nowell was there alone.

‘ Holloa ! all by yourself ? ’ said Hugh.

‘ Well, you may see that for yourself. How’s business to-day ? ’

Question recurring as regularly as noon and midnight, and which must be answered with a punctuality and an exactitude as great as theirs. Nowell could only give a hasty report this evening, and excused himself on the plea that he was in a hurry.

‘ I’m going to town to-night instead of at the week-end,’ he observed. ‘ Some of these people are pressing for an answer, and Hankinson thinks the sooner I’m off the better.’

‘ Eh ? ’ said his elder, with a sharp sus-

picious look. It was his manner always when in anyway taken by surprise, but it always irritated Nowell—as much now almost as when he had been wont first to encounter it. He rather unwillingly and rapidly repeated his information, and then, thinking he heard the sound of the hall-door opening, he quickly and abruptly left the room, purposely not hearing his grandfather's voice call his name.

‘It will do when I come up again,’ he said to himself. ‘I wonder if that is Aunt Agatha, or where she is.’

A servant was lighting the gas in the hall. The person who had come in, and who was now putting her umbrella in the stand, was not Mrs. Robson, but his cousin Peril.

‘Have you been out alone, Peril?’ he asked, following her into the library.

‘Yes, to be sure,’ said she nonchalantly, as she picked up a kitten which was lying

curled up in an armchair, and herself took the place. She leaned back and stroked the creature. 'I've been to Southfield again, and I've just met your dear friend Mr. Lawford, and had a short conversation with him.'

'Confound my dear friend Mr. Lawford! Do you know where Aunt Agatha is?'

'I am thankful to say I have not even seen her since breakfast-time. It is rather late in the day to be "confounding" Mr. Lawford; I consider him one of my intimate friends.'

There was ire in Peril's eyes, but Hugh did not see it, or if he did, did not notice it. He was in a hurry. He wanted something to eat, and then he was going off to London. And yet he felt indolent, and somewhat disinclined to move from this warm, pleasant room: more disposed to retain the seat he had taken on the edge of the table, to swing his legs about, and watch Peril's nonchalant

grace of attitude, and her slim white hands twinkling about as she teased the kitten, for she had given over caressing now, and had begun to provoke it.

‘You know he isn’t anything of the kind,’ he said.

‘Oh yes, he is. He is so delightfully easy-going. It is *such* a relief to meet a man who doesn’t get into rages and fight about things. He doesn’t care two straws whether we have a Liberal Government or a Tory one ; and he thinks it would be such a bore to “keep up a position,” as people say, that he is very glad he is only a vagabond.’

‘That’s one way of looking at it,’ said Nowell. ‘Some people might say he was a lazy beggar, without any self-respect.’

‘Some people might say all sorts of things, but you must be in a very bad temper to say anything of the sort. No one can say he has no self-respect. He has too much of it to



turn himself into a mere machine for money-making, that's all. There are different ways of looking at self-respect.'

'There certainly are—and at kittens too. Do let the poor little wretch alone,' said Hugh, worked up into a fever by watching the pertinacity with which she intercepted its attempts to escape.

'Ah, would you scratch me, little wretch!' she suddenly exclaimed; and the lithe hand which had been so daintily playing closed tightly round the kitten's neck.

Grasping it by the throat, she held up the wretched little struggling thing in the air and shook it, and every flexible, graceful line of her own form had changed into angry rigidity.

'Peril, put it down; you will strangle it!' he exclaimed; and forcibly loosening her grasp, he took the kitten away and dropped it on the floor.

Choking and gasping, the creature rushed

off to the other side of the room, and glared at her from under a chair.

‘What do I care? it scratched me.’

‘I don’t wonder,’ said Hugh.

She shrugged her shoulders, and Hugh inquired next where else she had been.

‘Making a call at the Magsons’, and hearing about Norah’s missionary. They had a sort of Dorcas-meeting going on, and wanted me to sew petticoats for pauper children. I said I thought it would save trouble if I didn’t, as they would have to take it all out again. By the way, I’ve often meant to ask—who was Dorcas?’

‘A good woman, in the Acts of the Apostles,’ said Hugh promptly. ‘At least, I think so; or was it in one of the Epistles?’

‘Much you know about it. It is my private opinion that she was the patron saint of all gossips and scandalmongers; I heard oceans of both. Oh, what a delightful world it

is that Mrs. Magson and her friends live in ! Mrs. Magson would speak kindly of other people sometimes if she dared, but she dare not. I left soon, on purpose to give them the opportunity of relieving their minds about me.'

'I've no doubt they will take the fullest advantage of it. But look here, Peril, I am in a hurry ; I must find Aunt Agatha. I'm going to London to-night, instead of on Saturday.'

'To-night ? Why, you promised to take me to the concert to-morrow night,' said Peril, looking both angry and disappointed—as indeed she was, and as, perhaps, it was not surprising that she should be, seeing how seldom she got the chance of going to such an entertainment, especially in Hugh's company.

'So I did ! I had utterly forgotten it ; but even if I had remembered I couldn't have

helped it. It is business that sends me, and I'm obliged to go. But you need not miss the concert, Peril ; Aunt Agatha would take you.'

'Aunt Agatha !'

Her voice told Nowell that Aunt Agatha was quite impracticable for the purpose.

'I quarrelled with her frightfully only last night,' said Peril, 'and I haven't spoken to her to-day. She began with some of her nasty, cat-like insinuations, and I told her my mind about it. Besides, even if I hadn't, imagine going with her to listen to anything beautiful ! She hardly knows a violin from a trombone, and she's proud of her ignorance too.'

'Well, I was going to call upon Miss Hankinson to-night ; I haven't time now, but I'll send her a note and ask her to take you.'

'You will do no such thing,' was the reply, with a sudden access of anger and sharpness

in her tones. 'Do you suppose I have any desire to foist myself upon people who don't want me? Why should Miss Hankinson be bothered with me? She has very likely got engagements of her own. Send the tickets back, or give them to some one else, and I'll stay at home.'

'You are so hasty. There is no "foisting," as you call it. Mar—Miss Hankinson——'

'That's twice within twenty-four hours that you have called her "Mar," and stopped short. Pray does she call you "Hugh" too? If she does she can't stop short, seeing that you have but one syllable to your name.'

Hugh's face flushed.

'Don't talk in that way, Peril,' he said, both quickly and gently. 'She does call me Hugh now and then. I hope she will always before long; and then there will be no more trouble about concerts or chaperons, and no

more quarrels with Aunt Agatha, will there ?'

Peril uttered no sound. Her face took a look as hard as stone. She had no time to realize what she felt ; but it was an utter apathetic recklessness that rushed over her. So she had begun her fight too late. The game had been virtually in the hands of the other before she had ever discovered that it had been begun. Her last dim, half-confessed hope ; the one spark of joy which she had had to live for, had been extinguished at a moment's notice. If Hugh expected sentimental sympathy and congratulations, he had come to the wrong place for them.

'Dear me, how beautiful ! Margaret Hankinson will do whatever you wish, I have not the least doubt,' she said suddenly, and in a voice which seemed to cut like a whip.

'What do you mean ? What makes you speak of Miss Hankinson in that manner ?'

he asked, stung more by her tone than her actual words.

It was now his turn to speak coldly and freezingly, just as Peril had said to herself that he did. He contrived certainly to throw a peculiarly chilling influence into both glance and voice. The interview, begun so carelessly, had turned into a fierce combat.

‘No one but you would ask such a simple question,’ said she, laughing flippantly. ‘You are really wonderfully innocent for such a man of the world as you give yourself out to be ; and she has imposed upon you in a marvellous manner. I never heard of anyone but you who believed in her. She believes in nothing herself except money, and in the pursuit of that she and her father are agreed—like everyone else in Darkingford, it seems to me. I suppose she will even stoop to inveigle a boy like you in her nets—when the boy is likely to have money sometime.’

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Peril laughed again, and lightly balanced the tips of her fingers together, looking at him all the time with a rallying air.

Nowell felt almost dizzy with mingled fury and astonishment. Here was gratitude with a vengeance! Hugh had a fine underlying sense that it was a pronounced case of a man's having nursed a serpent in his bosom with the proverbial results, which conviction afforded him some solace in the midst of his perturbation. If it had not been so dreadful he could have laughed aloud at the spectacle of Peril turned censorious, with the censoriousness of Mrs. Magson and Ebenezer. Of course his first impulse was to turn upon her and angrily bid her hold her tongue, unless she could speak more becomingly of Margaret Hankinson; but just as he was about to speak he looked at her, and it seemed to him as if he saw woe beneath all that flippancy. As if by a revelation he saw the



misery that underlay her fury. He did not connect it with any personal disappointment on her part ; he was not vain, and as he was pure of any love for her, so he had not imagined that she cherished any for him. But she was unhappy. In the innocence and simplicity of his heart he wished that she had a lover of her own to teach her a little tenderness, and show her a little more sunshine. All his manlier nature came to the front. He would not retaliate; to do so would be to show himself no more self-controlled than she was herself, and would be hardly treating Margaret's name with the greatest respect imaginable. In a voice which vibrated a little, he said :

‘ Ah, Peril ! that isn't a kind thing to say to me on such a matter. I thought you would have cared more about my happiness. I would not like to say such a bitter thing to you if you'd told me of some man you cared

for ; but I know that Margaret would forgive you, and what she would forgive it is not for me to resent.'

Peril, hearing this rather self-conscious but perfectly well-meant little flourish, felt as if she should choke. She could have borne it far better—nay, she would have comparatively enjoyed it, if he had turned upon her, and, so to speak, rent her with counter-sneers and counter-insults. But to first receive such a blow as his virtual confession that he was in love with Margaret Hankinson, and then to be treated to a soothing speech, like a wilful child who cries because its promised toy is not forthcoming, was intolerable, utterly intolerable. Her fury hardly left her time to feel the still keener anguish inflicted by the involuntary tenderness in Hugh's tone when he spoke of Margaret. But it was all there : the full measure of the suffering that was to come, and it would come all in good time.

She made no answer to his words. Her face was convulsed ; her lips moved, but no sound came from them. Silently and swiftly she left the room and went upstairs, making a gesture with her hand as she passed her cousin, as though she would have swept him away.

Hugh shrugged his shoulders and rang the bell, and desired them to tell Mrs. Robson he wanted to see her particularly. Little time remained to him, and in less than an hour he had left the house without seeing either Peril or Mr. Nowell again.

Peril, almost blind with passion, had gone up the stairs as far as the drawing-room door. She entered the room because she felt as if her limbs would fail under her, and she could go no further. She found it lighted by the bright fire only ; tenanted by her grandfather and no one else.

The old man had been dozing ; her sudden

entrance roused him, and he sat up staring blankly about him.

‘Eh, Peril! what’s the matter, lass? Why haven’t you taken off your bonnet? And where’s Mrs. Robson?’

‘I don’t know,’ she said indistinctly.

‘And where’s Hugh?’

‘Downstairs.’

‘What’s he going off to London for in such a hurry?’

‘How do I know? Perhaps to find some money to set your friend Mr. Hutchinson up in business.’

‘Hutchinson will never do any business again. But I’ve got my money from him—hech! hech!’

‘You’ve got some money, not Hutchinson’s,’ said Peril, standing before him, and feeling a little cold shudder thrilling through her at the horrible wickedness that she was committing. ‘Hugh didn’t want to be so

hard upon Mr. Hutchinson as you did, so he paid you out of your own money. Hutchinson is all right.'

'Peril! Peril!' he quavered dolefully, 'what's this you are saying about Hugh? Take care what you are saying about him.'

'I'm saying what is true. I would say it if he walked into the room now, and he could not contradict me : ask him.'

'It's not true ; he said they had paid up all right.'

'They never did. It said in the paper that they had compounded with their creditors ; and what's more, I heard at the Magsons' to-day that they are going to begin business again, and retrieve everything. Hugh knows how to spend other people's money.'

With which, not heeding his almost agonized cry to her to remain, she walked away, leaving him wild with rage, suspicion, disappointed greed, and frantic anger against

his grandson, together with the darkest forebodings as to what was to become of his money—his dear, dear money, when it got into hands like these.

Mrs. Robson, engaged with Hugh, imagined that Peril was with her grandfather. The old man was left alone for nearly an hour to con over the news, to curse Hugh, and to make all kinds of plots and plans for securing his money safely when he should be gone. No one was safe. He could have trusted in Hugh, he fancied; and now he saw what he was worth. He must settle something soon: tie it up safely, and keep very quiet about it. Aha, my young master, no more of such doings! Who could ever get rich if they treated their creditors in that way? And what fortune was there that would not soon slip through the fingers which kept no firmer hold than that upon it?

‘Bi’ the mass!’ he ejaculated, swearing the

old oath that used to be familiar to his Lancashire lips when he was a lad, and which even Ebenezer's teachings had not eradicated from them. 'Bi' the mass, I'll be even with them yet, and one too many for them, though they are young and I am old !

END OF VOL. I.





